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A NEW GODIVA.

BY
STANLEY HOPE,
AUTHOR OF "GEOFFREY'S WIFE."

"And built herself an everlasting name."—TENNYSON,

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.
1876.
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251. d. 237.

This Tale is already dramatised by the Author.

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PART I.



A NEW GODIVA.

CHAPTER I.

A STORMY NIGHT.

IT was not altogether a night for a woman to be making her way along a dark Devonshire lane.

The rain was coming down in floods ; the darkness was so intense that, like the Egyptian plague of old, it might almost be felt ; the wind, coming off the sea, where it was playing sad havoc with the

hapless ships, was doing its best to uproot the tall elms which bordered the narrow roadway, and caused such an uproar among the struggling branches that many of them yielded the point at once, and preferred parting company bodily with the parent stem to holding out longer in so hopeless a contest with the storm.

In the pauses of the wind which swept in gusts through the valley, the low roar of the sea could be heard stealing up the lane, denoting the proximity of the coast. Now and again an odour of seaweed mingled with the faint smell of the rain. Had there been any light to speak of, patches of white scud which had scaled the cliffs and sailed away inland on the breast of the gale might have been seen ; a sure token of the fury of the wind, which had churned

the salt spray into a yellow yeast, and choked therewith all the nooks and cranies of the rocks, which stood like bastions to resist the huge sea waves.

Taking advantage of a lull, the woman paused at an angle of the road where it branched off more inland. She was of middle age, plainly clad, and belonged evidently to the class of hardy peasants who inhabit the rural districts of South Devon. Her clothes were streaming with wet, her bonnet was almost torn from her head, and her cloak, even in the comparative lull, swayed about significantly, as if it meditated following the example of the vanquished branches, and yielding itself up to the resistless wind.

“The Lord be praised! there be the linhay. Another quarter-mile and I shall be

there," she exclaimed, as the little erection in question loomed up through the darkness by the roadside. "Not all the masters in England should have made me turn out such a night as this if I'd a knowed what I had to put up with. But, poor young man, he be awful bad, sure enough. There's one thing, he's a gentleman every inch of him, and it's a pleasure doing anything for the likes o' him."

She passed on again down the lane until she reached a gate where a narrow road, with wheel-tracks a foot deep, led through a sort of copse. Here the trees arched so thickly above that she was fain to grope with her hand along the bushes which grew on either side. In spite of every precaution, the roughness of the road caused her to stumble and almost fall at

every few yards, and sundry ejaculations of a character not complimentary to the pathway broke angrily from her lips.

“Thank the Lord! there’s a gleam at last,” she exclaimed, as, at a turn of the road, a light from a cottage window streamed out upon the darkness. “Jim Price will be a’most mazed to see me here this time o’ night, for ’tis a main lonely spot, sure enough.”

The cottage appeared to be the abode of a gamekeeper, as it stood in a little clearing, with the wood within a few yards on every side. It was evidently in the depths of a valley, for the storm, which might still be heard roaring at a distance, seemed to pass far overhead, and left this little nook in the woods in comparative repose. The rain, too, had now ceased,

and giving her garments a shake, to get rid of some of the superfluous moisture, the woman moved towards the door and rapped loudly with her knuckles.

There was an exclamation of surprise from within in response to the knock, and then the short snapping bark of a couple of small dogs, who rushed angrily to the door and sniffed suspiciously at the foot of it. The deep tones of a man's voice, however, soon silenced their yelps, and then the same voice demanded who was there.

"It's me, Betty Morcombe. Open the door, God bless you. I be dripping with wet, and as tired as a dog, for I've a come all the way from the 'Hare and Hounds' in the pouring rain."

At the sound of her voice the door was quickly thrown open, and the form of a

tall, broad-shouldered man appeared in the doorway.

On seeing Betty he drew her within the cottage, and then stood staring at her in amazement.

“Betty ! why whatever brings yew here such a night as this ?” he exclaimed.

“Let me sit down first, and I’ll tell’ee all about it,” the woman answered, as she passed into the common sitting-room of the cottage, and took a seat on the old wooden settle by the fire.

“A drap of warm cider be the best thing for yew,” said the man, as he took from a shelf a small pointed saucepan of the pattern so much in vogue among the peasantry of the west.

Betty raised no objection, and her host proceeded to fill the saucepan from the

contents of a jug which stood upon the large wooden table in the centre of the room. Inserting the pointed extremity of the utensil deep down among the coals, he left it for the cider to warm, and turned again with an inquiring glance to his visitor.

“Now then, Betty, what’s up?”

“First of all, how’s the missus?” questioned Betty in reply.

“Oh, *she’s* right enough. Getting on as well as need be. She’s only fretting.”

“And the babby?”

“As bad as bad can be. Her’s a been but a poor little toad from the day her was born, and though it’ll be hard for the missus, the sooner her’s took the better, say I. Not but what I love the little toad myself, but missus will fret her heart out if so be the cheild pines away day after

day like her's a bin doing for the last two weeks. But now then what's your business? What brings yew here this time o' night?"

"A queer business enough. There's a young gent a-dying at our house; I don't believe he'll live the night out. He's sent word to say he must see yew to-night. I believe he knows he ain't long for this world, and he would have somebody set off to fetch you to once."

"To fetch me? whatever does he want me for?"

"That's best known to himself. He said nought to the master about that. We don't even know who he is, or where he comes from. Tom was sent off on the pony to fetch the doctor—a brave ride he'll have too—Peter was up to the house,

and there was nobody but me to come for yew."

"Yew don't know who he be?"

"No. He walked in this afternoon, from Lord knows where. He were soaked with the rain ; and what with the walking, or the cold, or something, he took a fit of coughing so bad that he broke a blood-vessel, or something of that sort, and there he's a been in bed ever since."

"But why didn't 'ee send for the doctor to once?"

"He wouldn't have him. It's my belief he don't want to be know'd ; but when he found how bad he was a-getting, he said as how we might send ; but, for all that, he wouldn't have let Tom go, if I hadn't a promised to come here for yew."

"A queer business, sure enough. I can't

refuse a dying man ; though what he wants me for, the Lord only knows. I suppose I'd a better start to once. Now then, wet your whistle with that. It'll do 'ee a power of good after your soaking."

Jim had raised the saucepan from the fire and poured a portion of the contents, hissing hot, into a tumbler, adding thereto a small quantity of ginger and sugar, from the dresser hard by. Betty took a draught, the length of which fully revealed her appreciation of the refreshing beverage, and then set down her tumbler, nearly empty, on the table.

" Shall I stay with the missus till yew do come back ?" she asked.

" No call for that," Jim responded.
" Susy be with her. She'll be glad to see yew, however."

"Better not," responded the other. "It'll only upset her at this time o' night, and the sooner I'm back the better."

"As yew please," said Jim, as he proceeded to take down a thick coat from a peg in the corner of the room. "After all," he added, "it'll only be going out an hour earlier than I meant. They've a been uncommon busy down in Long Wood lately, and I was a-going to take a turn round to see if I could drop upon any of 'em. It ain't to be wondered at, sure 'nough, for the pheasants be running about as tame as fowls, and nobody ever comes to shoot 'em."

"Sir Robert's away in foreign parts still, I suppose?"

"Yes, and likely to stop there. Young Master Arthur will wake us up a bit by-and-by, I sim. He be ready for any

amount of sport, he be. Uncommon fine boy he be, too. I'll just take a look upstairs afore we go, to see if the missus be all right."

Jim stole noiselessly up the narrow stairs, which ascended from the passage, but returned in a few minutes, and reported that "missus" was asleep. He was followed by Susy, a healthy, good-natured servant-girl, who had come down to make fast the door after the two should have departed.

Jim lighted a short pipe, and placing it between his teeth, took his gun from a corner of the room, intending, as he said, to make a round, after visiting the sick gentleman who lay ill at the little country inn which rejoiced in the name of "The Hare and Hounds." After pressing another glass of cider upon Betty, which she

without much difficulty disposed of, and helping himself to an equally copious draught, Jim and his companion left the cottage together, and setting their faces to the storm, which still raged without, they pursued their way, with sturdy strides, towards the inn.



CHAPTER II.

AT THE LITTLE INN.

“**I**S he come?” asked the sick man, turning wearily on his pillow.

“Not yet,” replied the good-natured landlady, who had taken upon herself the office of nurse until some arrangement could be made; “I can’t think what’s come to the doctor, he ought to be here now.”

“Hang the doctor! he can do me no good.”

“Don’t say that, sir. The Lord be

willing, he may bring you quite round again."

"Don't delude yourself with that idea, my good woman. I know exactly how I am; and I know I am not long for this world. Moreover, except for one reason, I don't much care."

"Hush, sir! You'd better not talk too much. You'll bring on the cough again. Hark, I hear somebody below now. I'll see who it is."

The landlady hastened from the room. The sick man turned on his pillow to listen.

He was quite young. Not more than three or four-and-twenty. His features were refined, and would have been handsome, but for the ravages of that fell disease which nips in the bud so many a

youthful heart in this changeful clime of ours. The face was worn and emaciated. A hectic flush glowed on the cheek. The eyes were large and lustrous, but even through the traces of illness were filled with a devil-may-care expression, indicative of a reckless life—a life of wilfulness and dissipation, which had probably hastened the climax that was now at hand.

He spoke eagerly, as the landlady re-entered the room.

“Has Price arrived?”

“Yes, sir. He’s just come in. Shall he come up?”

“Yes, send him up at once.”

He sank back on his pillow, as if relieved. A few moments after Jim Price entered the room, ushered in by the landlady, who, with the curiosity natural to her

sex, lingered to see what would take place.

The sick man waved his thin hands towards her, impatiently. "Leave us," he said, in a peremptory tone.

She obeyed, but only drew the door to after her, without closing it.

"Shut the door, Price," were the next words that issued from the bed.

Price obeyed, dropping the latch of the door into the catch.

"Bolt it," was the further injunction.

The gamekeeper shot the bolt, and then turned towards the bed, wondering what was to come next. He looked at the sick man as he would have looked at an entire stranger.

"Jim, don't you know me?"

Something in the voice made Jim start.

"Why, God bless my soul! Master George!"

"You've hit it, Jim, though you never expected to see me in such a plight as this. How are you, old fellow?"

The thin hand was extended from the bed. Price clasped it in his own brawny one, while the suspicion of a tear for a moment dimmed his sight.

"Lord save us, Master George! to think that I should ever see you in such a plight as this! Why, yew be gone a'most to a whipping-post."

"I shall be gone altogether before long, Price; that's why I sent for you to-night. There's no time to be lost. If I get another attack, I'm a dead man. Not all the doctors in Christendom could pull me through."

"What do'ee want me to do?"

"It's a long story, but I must get through it as well as I can. Give me a drop of that milk by your side. It's the only thing the good woman will let me have till the doctor comes. I'd have given her a fiver for a glass of brandy. They seem to be strangers here."

"Old Brown died of drink a year ago. These people took on the house. They came from up country, but they be good sort of folks."

"All the better for me that they are strangers, though I don't believe my own father would know me. I suppose that amiable gentleman is still at sea?"

"You've heered nothing of him then?"

"How should I till the expedition returns? I only crossed from the continent three days ago, and have had no news of

anybody. But I'm losing time. We can talk about general matters afterwards, if I've any breath left in my body. Now, look here, Price. You know how rough the governor cut up on account of my marriage. He needn't have been so angry. Poor Katie wouldn't have troubled him long. She's dead."

"You don't say so, Master George?"

"Yes. It's true enough, Price. She died in my arms abroad, six weeks ago. She was the only person that ever really understood me. If she had lived I should have been a different man. As it was, I took to drink again after her death, and here I am, dying."

He passed his hand feebly across his eyes, and a deep sigh broke from his lips. Price was visibly affected.

"But your heart were always in the right place, Master George. I always said so to my missus."

"It's about your missus I want to speak to you. I was hanging about the old place the day before yesterday, just to see what it looked like after all these years, when I got into conversation with old Tom Dunstan. He didn't know me from Adam, so I plied him with questions about old friends. Naturally, I asked after you, and he told me you were in trouble at present, as your missus had just been confined, and the child was dying. Is this true?"

"I be sorry to say it tes."

"I am grieved both for you and your wife too, Jim ; but, strange to say, your trouble will help me to carry out a scheme which came into my head the

moment I heard the child was likely to die."

"What be it, Master George?"

"Price, I've got a little daughter myself. I left her with the nurse at Sandport. She's a healthy child, and likely to live, though she has lost her mother. Now, listen to me. I know a few days, a few weeks at the most, must finish me; don't interrupt me, for I haven't too much breath. Your wife was a sort of mother to me always, and I came over here chiefly with the idea of getting you to take care of my child."

"Oh, Master George, we bain't fit to take charge of she."

"Be quiet. You don't think I'd leave her in the hands of strangers. My old aunt is dead, and besides I had too much of her

tender care when I was young to make me wish to leave my child in her hands, if she were alive. No, no, I don't care what position in life people are in, so long as they are kind-hearted and honest ; and I know you and your dear wife are both. What I should have done without her in my young days, I don't know. When I heard about your baby, a new idea came into my head. If the poor little thing should be taken, could you manage to pass my child off as your own ?”

“ Lord, Master George ! whatever should us do that for ?”

“ Listen. You know how implacable my father is. How he swore he would never see my face again, and how he left the old place, vowing he would never return to it. I couldn't trust my child to

his tender mercies even if he were here. No. If you can carry out my scheme, you might some day or other find out what his feelings are about me. I expect he will soften when he finds I am dead and gone. If he does, and you think there is a chance of his being kind to my dear little girl, you can tell him the truth. Besides, it is a fancy of mine, and you must not refuse me—that is, if you can get your wife to consent.”

“ If you think it be the best thing to be done, you know, the missus would make no objection, sir ; but it be a terrible thing for your daughter to come amongst humble folks like we.”

“ You may banish that thought at once, Price. Don’t you think I should be far happier in the thought that she was among

kind-hearted people, who have been kind to me, than I should if she were left to strangers ; or to so implacable a man as my father ?”

“ That may be, sir ; but how be we to keep it quiet ? It would be sure to leak out.”

“ No. I have thought it all over, and it can be managed with very little difficulty. There’s a wet-nurse with my child at Sandport—one I picked up in Boulogne. She was anxious to come to England for a change, and was glad of the chance. There is no reason why she should not come at once to your cottage, and look after your wife. My child might pass as yours, and if it should please Heaven to take your little one, living as you do in that remote spot, there would be very little

difficulty in substituting one child for another. I've arranged all the details in my mind. We can talk about that later on. The children are about the same age. You don't have a visitor once in a month, and no one who comes in casually would know the difference between two babies at that age. Only say you'll consent, and we'll arrange all minor matters to your satisfaction."

"Well, Master George, you know if you be bent upon it I can't refuse."

"And your wife?"

"Whatever I tell her, I know she'll do. She's always a been as fond of you as I be."

"You've taken a load off my mind; and now as to money matters——"

"Don't'ee bother yourself about that, sir.

Me and my missus don't want no payment from yew."

"Nonsense, Jim! You don't suppose I'm going to saddle my child on you for nothing! No, no. I've already realised the small remnant of the fortune which came to me from my dear mother, and that will be placed at interest for you to draw half-yearly. Then, if you choose to indulge my darling child with a few little extras now and then, you can do so; but I make no stipulation, mind. I leave it all to you. As to the future, as I said before, you must be guided by circumstances. But, mind, I solemnly bind you to this——"

He was interrupted by a tap at the door.

"Confound them, why do they come

bothering here?" he added, impatiently.
"See who it is, Price."

Price went to the door in response to a second rap. The landlady was there with the announcement that the doctor was below.

"Let him come up in three minutes," the sick man said. "Price, I must see you again after; but before you go, let me say this in case I should go out like the snuff of a candle, while you are away. You will on no account reveal the secret of my child's birth unless you see some symptoms of relenting in her grandfather, and can get from him some assurance that he will be kind to her. Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes, Master George."

"You promise?"

"I promise before God Almighty."

"I need not ask you to be kind to her, I know you will be that. Now get down. It's as well not to be seen closeted here with me. Come up as soon as he is gone."

The doctor appeared, and gave a more favourable report of the patient than the kind-hearted landlady had hoped for.

"Will it be possible for me to be removed to Sandport to-morrow?" the patient asked.

"I should fear the removal to-morrow, but if you continue pretty well through the day, you might venture the day after if you can get a comfortable carriage sent over to take you there; but I will see you again before you leave. Meanwhile I will send you something to keep up your strength. There is one thing I must es-

pecially enjoin — perfect quiet ; and,” he added smiling, “ don’t try another walk of ten miles in the rain.”

With that he bowed himself out. The landlady remained in the room. “ Is there anything I can do for you, sir ?” she asked.

“ Send Price up,” was the reply.

“ Excuse me, sir, but the doctor particularly said you was to be quiet.”

“ It is not a matter of choice, my good woman, but of necessity. I *must* see him again to-night.”

Price returned, but he had been warned by the landlady, and he begged the patient not to talk any more that night ; but to see him again the next day.

“ To-morrow may be too late, Price,” the other answered sadly. “ I don’t put much faith in what the doctor said. I *feel* like a

dying man. Look in the breast-pocket of that coat on the chair. Not the outer-pocket, the inner one. There's a pocket-book there, is there not?"

"Yes, Mr. Bolt."

"You had better keep it. In case of accidents, I have there drawn up careful instructions, and furnished you with all necessary documents. The nurse knows of my intentions with regard to bringing Katie to your cottage, and my agents—Moore and Co., of Lincoln's Inn, whose address you will find in the pocket-book—will arrange all that is necessary about money. Are the family up at the house now?"

"No. Still abroad."

"That will save you some little trouble, as you won't have them to attend to, and

they need know nothing of your domestic arrangements. Sir Robert and my father never knew much of each other, I believe ?”

“ No. It were Sir Robert’s brother, Captain Arthur Deverell, who was your father’s friend. They were always like one when they were lads, and they went to sea together. Captain Deverell’s son comes into the property, the baronet having no child of his own.”

“ And about your boy : is he alive and kicking ?”

“ Yes, fay. He be regular pickle, he be. We be obliged to send him away to school as a weekly boarder. His mother could do nought with him at home. A fine-spirited lad, Mr. Bolt, though I say it as ought not.”

"Then he won't be in the way of our little scheme, Price."

"Not he, sir. He never even looks at the babby when he's at home. But, Mr. Bolt, do let me see 'ee again to-morrow. You're flying, as I may say, right in the doctor's face. Yew don't give yourself a chance."

"Very well, old friend. Good-night, if you must go. I confess I should like a few days' respite just to see this affair carried out. But mind, Price, whatever happens, I trust implicitly to you."

"That yew may do, sir, with all your heart and soul."

The honest gamekeeper took the thin hand in his own again, and pressed it warmly.

"Good-night, Master George, and God bless you," he said.

"God bless you, Price, for all your goodness to me. My love to your wife."

"I shall see 'ee early in the morning, sir."

"We'll hope so. Good-night."

The gamekeeper left the room, and the sick man sank back wearily on his pillow.

That night another soul—another unit in the vast scheme of Creation—drifted away into eternity.

In the early twilight hours, from some unexplained cause—possibly over exertion—hæmorrhage set in, and before the doctor could arrive the patient was dead.

It was said in the neighbourhood that Captain Bolt's wild son had come back to his native place to die. It was known that his wife had died a few weeks before

somewhere abroad, but the secret of the child's existence was known only to the nurse and kind-hearted Jim Price and his wife.



CHAPTER III.

KATIE.

SPRING-GREEN over all the land.

A heaving sea of leaves just rippled by the early morning breeze.

The apple blossoms breaking here and there through the green, like spotless spray.

Far above, lost in the blue ether, a lark whose presence is known only by the floods of melody, which fall like a bright April shower from some stray corner of a cloud.

A realm of deep, intense, endless blue above, flecked here and there with a cloud

as white and soft as the breast of a swan. All so pure and fresh and young that the influence of the season steals into the heart and fills it with an indescribable delight—an inner sensation of joyousness at the bare fact of existence, such as no other season can impart.

Here by this mossy bank a fragrance of violets steals upwards as we pass—the violets themselves unseen in the wealth of vegetation around. The slopes by the woodside sparkle with primroses far and near. Early butterflies flutter into life and sunshine. Anon the hum of a wild bee breaks upon the ear; the woods are alive with song.

“The Cuckoo tells his name to all the hills.”

The glad sun looks down with a smile

upon the life and beauty he has called forth, and seems to rejoice exceedingly in his handiwork.

Let us follow the windings of this happy stream, down into the shade of yonder dell. It is tired of sunshine. It has come from the far moorland, looming grey above the distant trees. It has revelled in sunlight all through the freshest hours of the morning, and it hies away to a noonday siesta in the deep recesses of the glen. There are delicious pools down there, where the trout lurks in amber shade, and the flecks of foam from the waterfalls above glide smoothly over the umber-coloured pools, or gather into clusters among the ferns and grasses that fringe the bank. Here and there the waters glide to a lower level, over a rounded slope of rock, polished

by the ceaseless action of ages ; and on either side, high above, ferns, mosses, pendant trees, and festoons of flowers, drape the overhanging rocks, through which, in ages long gone by, the patient waters carved a winding channel, and found a passage to the sea.

Half a mile of shade. A delicious retreat in the sultry noonday hours ; where even the hum of insects is almost hushed, and the dragon-fly and kingfisher — rivals in lustrous hues—glance like prismatic beams athwart the gloom, and the babble of the stream comes up, subdued and soft through the curtain of verdure that sweeps to the water's edge.

Then the stream breaks away again with a ripple, like a silvery laugh, and courses over shining pebbles, where a keen angler

would cautiously drop his fly, and where, ten to one, the wily trout who watches at the foot of the stickle, would rise at the tempting bait, only to find it—like the baits that tempt mankind—as delusive as it is bright. Beyond the stickle a stretch of green meadow on one side, and on the other deep woods—the sacred preserves of Norton Towers—renowned for pheasant and woodcock, and cautiously guarded, night and day, by stalwart men, of whom Jim Price is chief.

Standing on the mead, beside the stickle, you may see the smoke from his cottage curling up among the trees, half a mile away. It is some distance from “The Towers,” —three miles or more, and a young man whose hand is not yet thoroughly “in” at fly-fishing, and who had

been trying all the most likely spots since early morning, with but indifferent success, would be not unlikely to throw himself on the tempting turf at this point, and look with longing eyes towards the distant smoke ; wondering, possibly, whether a draught of the far-famed cider of the district might be had, for love or money, in that sylvan abode.

Some such thought as this was evidently revolving in the mind of young Arthur Deverell, as he lay on the grass before-mentioned, and reflected on the result of his morning labours. The spotted denizens of the stream had been unusually wary. His basket was but a few ounces heavier than when he set out from "The Towers." Being of a somewhat impatient disposition, he contemplated the result with a consider-

able feeling of disgust, and felt half-disposed to pitch basket, rod, flies, and fish bodily into the stream. Nine times out of ten the result of angling is the same. The fish wisely refuse to be taken in—the angler rails at fate, and illogically considers himself an injured man. Had he slain a basket full of the finny tribe, he would have been in a seventh heaven of delight. Has civilization quite done its work, or are we still semi-barbarians?

But there was the smoke, with doubtless a cottage, or some dwelling beneath, and the young man rose up, literally in hot haste.

“A glass of cider I *must* have. I have a sort of dim recollection that Jim Price’s cottage is somewhere about here. I know I went to it ever so many years ago. Ages

it seems to me. Let me see, when was it ? Last time I was here. That must have been six years ago at least."

Six years to a youth of sixteen ! What untold ages it seems ! Yet how the years race by when we are growing old. Six years ! they seem but a few hours, but in youth they are like a long life.

"How am I to get across ! Aha ! I think I see a shallow down yonder. It won't hurt me much this hot weather if I get a wetting ; but down there I don't believe it is over my boots."

Sixteen doesn't stick at two feet or so of water. It rather likes a wetting than otherwise. It implies a soul above trifling physical discomforts. Childhood is fond of water and dirt. In London we see children leaping with joy round heaps of roadside

slush, and rejoicing if one plumps into the middle ; but the unsympathetic mother emerges from a dark alley, and jerks Tommy from his slush and his fun with a venemence which makes Tommy howl. The mother forgets that she once revelled in slush herself.


Young Deverell reached the farther side without difficulty, and struck out straight towards the cottage. A little gate at the border of the wood opened on a winding path, and this led through trees, bright with early foliage, to Jim Price's cottage.

It wore a somewhat different aspect to the one we remember on a certain rainy night twelve years ago. Jim Price was older by that number of years than he was when we saw him last, and he bore traces of it in the furrowed brow and the silver

streaks in his once jet black hair. He had known sorrow too, for the wife, who had been to him a helpmate for so many years, had been taken from him ; and but for one bright spot in his existence, his life at the cottage would have been a lonely one indeed.

He was busy in the little plot of garden round the house as young Deverell approached. At the sound of footsteps he looked up, and on recognising his visitor, touched his cap, and advanced to meet him. The boy was the first to speak.

“ Good morning, Price. I thought your diggings were somewhere about here, but I wasn’t sure. It’s so long since I was here before, that I hardly remember the different places. I intended to have asked you the way when you were up at the house



yesterday, but I forgot it. What a fine show of blossom you have !”

“Tolerable, Master Arthur. If it don’t get nipped by the late frosts, we shall have a good crop. Any sport, sir ?”

“Nothing to speak of. Only half a dozen miserable little things about as long as your finger. I came to see if I could get a glass of cider. The sun is as hot as if it were the middle of summer.”

“If yew do like it rough, I can give ’ee as good a drop as you’d get anywhere.”

“That’s the sort of stuff. We can’t get the genuine stuff up in our parts ; it’s all doctored.”

“Matched, Master Arthur.”

“How do you mean ?”

“Why, the Londoners won’t drink cider if so be it ain’t sweet ; so they burns a lot

of brimstone matches in a half-filled cask, and this keeps the cider sweet. That's what they do call matching of it. They tell me nothing else will sell in London. Just step in and take a seat, sir, while Katie gets the cider."

"Let's have it here, Price. I'll sit on this stump while you go on with your work."

"As yew plaze, sir," responded Price. "Here, Katie—Katie, I say!"

A girl's voice responded from the cottage, and the next moment a face appeared at the latticed window, which caused young Deverell to open his eyes wide with astonishment and admiration. It was that of a girl of twelve years old or thereabout; but it was so unlike the peasant faces which the boy had been accustomed to en-

counter in the neighbourhood, that he could hardly believe his eyes. There was the rosy glow of health, the cheek browned by the constant exposure to sun and air, it is true; but under all this was a refinement of feature and a purity of expression such as one rarely meets with, even among those whose lot it is to be brought up amid luxuries and refinements. Above all, there was in the pure blue eye and the golden hair, which played about the forehead and cheeks, that look which seems to lift some faces above the common run of earthly beauty, and connect it, in some indefinable way, with our notions of the divine. It is a look which, at any rate, can have no part with evil. Tenderness, truth, gentleness, all womanly virtues, are a part of it. Such eyes, with their calm open sincerity, could

no more deceive you than an angel could. In youth or age you might trust them as you would your own heart. They could never beguile or betray.

"Your daughter?" asked the boy, in amazement.

"Yes. My only one. My only comfort in life, now my poor missus be gone," Price answered, sadly.

"But your son, Jim, where is he? What fun we used to have together when I was quite a little chap. Jim was very kind to me; is he not here?"

"No, sir. He took it into his head to go to foreign parts. He didn't like the notion of settling down here; he wanted to make a fortune right off. He went to the gold-fields in Victoria two years ago. Katie, a jug of cider for Master Arthur. I

see he was not one to settle down quietly. He was always fond of roving, so I thought it were better to let him go."

"Have you good accounts of him?"

"Well, only middling. He don't seem to stick to one thing. He be a rolling stone, Master Arthur. He got tired of the diggings, where he hadn't much luck, and now he be at work on a sheep farm, and hopes to get one of his own some day, he tells me, but that wants pretty much capital."

Katie advanced from the house, jug in hand. In the full blaze of sunlight, with the cottage porch and its twining creepers as a background, she was a picture which Gainsborough would have rendered to perfection. The face was suffused with blushes now, for Katie's was a beauty which, like

the hidden flower, usually blushed unseen, and a stranger—more especially one in the form of a handsome youth, in rough, but fashionably cut knickerbockers—was, indeed, a *rara avis* in the land. She had scarcely ever looked upon such a sight before, and the novelty, together with the consciousness of the ardent gaze fixed upon her by the boy, overwhelmed her with shyness.

Sixteen is a susceptible age. It is a question whether any after-passion is more pure and genuine than the love of boyhood, before the knowledge of the world's sin and sorrow dims its lustre and steals away its fragrance. Passion that tears the soul to tatters may stir us to greater depths in after-life, but the love of childhood is like the love of angels—unruffled by the prompt-

ings of passion, unsullied by the consciousness of sin.

The three were soon engaged in an animated conversation. Katie's shyness wore off a little, and she took her visitor, at his earnest entreaty, to see her ducks and chickens, and a black ball of a retriever pup, which was just beginning to understand existence, and treating it all as a joke.

Then Price took Master Arthur down to the stream, and showed him the most killing flies, and initiated him into the mystery of insinuating his fly into dark corners overshadowed by troublesome foliage, without winding his tackle hopelessly round the twigs. Then Arthur, attracted by Katie's bright eyes, accepted an invitation to join the homely mid-day meal, which was spread with irreproachable neatness in

the cottage parlour in honour of the distinguished visitor.

That was a memorable day to young Deverell. It came back to him often in the after-time, as he pored over musty volumes at Eton, or urged the four-oar along the shining surface of the Isis. The bright spring morning; the pure white apple blossom in the orchard, together with the fresh spring flowers of the little cottage garden; the peas beginning to court the brown old sticks with their delicate green tendrils, like the soft hands of children clinging to the withered palms of age; the bees renewing their almost forgotten acquaintance with the flowers; the yellow butterfly, beguiled prematurely from its cocoon by the April sunshine; the twitter of the building sparrows, and the mellow

reiteration of the cuckoo from the neighbouring woods ; the new and strange sensations of delight in his heart as he returned up the glen towards his uncle's house when the day declined ;—all this dwelt in his mind for many a long day, and turned to sunshine many a gloomy hour.



CHAPTER IV.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

T was the same time of the year as that in which our story opens—the time of the autumn equinox. The same weather, too, prevailed. The wind swept in fierce gusts over the vast park at Norton Towers; the rain fell in torrents; the landscape, usually so fair, was blotted out; heaven and earth seemed coming together; desolation reigned around; leaves were stripped in whirling clouds from the stately trees, and twigs

and even large branches strewed all the ground.

Towards evening the wind suddenly veered and dropped ; the sun came out from a space of amber sky beneath a line of heavy grey clouds ; the birds, baffled and beaten all day, burst into one universal chant of joy from among the glittering leaves.


Sir Robert Deverell and his wife were coming home to Norton Towers after their long sojourn abroad. They drove away from the railway-station at Sandport just as the sun was dipping beneath the western hills. The chestnuts which drew the cosy family-carriage were fast steppers, and there was still considerable light in the sky when they passed the lodge-gates and entered upon the two miles of narrow road

which wound through the park. The road, for the greater part of the way, followed the course of the stream, rising and falling with the inequalities of the ground, now to the level of the water, now far above it, with rocks and trees intervening in the depths below. On the right rose a steep hill-side, with overhanging masses of rock and luxuriant depths of ivies, ferns, and grass. The overarching trees cast a deeper shadow here, and necessitated careful driving at this hour.

The carriage approached a sudden turn of the road at the foot of a steep declivity. Suddenly the coachman caught sight of a small white figure by the roadside, frantically waving its arms.

“Stop, stop! oh please stop!”

The cry was one of intense entreaty.



The coachman almost involuntarily checked the horses, which were advancing at a quick step. The little figure ran beside the carriage, still calling, "Oh, stop! please stop! you will be killed!"

The coachman was a man who valued his life. The carriage was brought to a standstill. The baronet put his head out of the window, calling to the coachman, "What on earth is the matter, Wells?"

"Don't know, Sir Robert. This little girl here is shouting for us to stop."

The child was out of breath. She stood panting beside the carriage, looking frightened.

"Oh, if you please, sir, the road is washed away," she gasped. "The carriage would tumble over into the stream."

This brought my lady's head to the window.

"Good heavens! what is she saying?"

A footman had extricated himself from his wraps and the seat behind. The lady's maid by his side felt disposed to scream.

"Where is it, my little girl?" quoth the baronet.

"Just round the corner, sir. Indeed you cannot go on."

"See what it is, William," says the baronet to the footman.

William cautiously advanced. It was out of his line—and fashionable footmen draw a hard and fast line at what is strictly considered their duty; but in this case William had no option. He peered round the corner only a few yards in advance of the carriage.

"Oh good Lord!"

He came back again in hot haste.

"The road is completely gone, Sir Robert," he said, touching his hat.

If a properly trained footman told you your mother had just died, he would touch his hat over the news; and somehow we all like it in these conventional days.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the baronet. "What abominable neglect not to have sent to the lodge. We might all have been killed, my dear!"

"How very dreadful," says easy-going Lady Deverell, subsiding into her corner and her furs.

"Oh, if you please, sir, it wasn't so just now," says the little girl. "Father sent me up to the house half an hour ago, and

the road was all right then. I only saw it as I came back."

"What a very merciful thing! Let me get out."

The baronet descended cautiously. He was a man of sixty or more, inclined to corpulency, gout, and various other ailments that are wont to afflict us as we advance in years—especially if we take life too luxuriously. Hence the baronet's partiality to German baths and waters.

Taking William's arm, he advanced slowly to the turn of the road. When he saw what was before him he too uttered a similar exclamation to the one of which William had delivered himself.

Indeed, the sight was alarming enough, but it was one which in a locality of this kind might present itself at any time. The

heavy rain had undermined and carried down quite a considerable landslip. A huge mass of rock had slid down from above, and now reposed in the middle of what was once the road, but the débris brought down with the rock had made a clean sweep through the trees, and shaved away the road to a dangerous slope of some twenty-five degrees. Three or four small trees had been also uprooted by the descending mass, and now encumbered the spot with their intertwined branches. Had the child not given the alarm, it is quite likely that young Arthur Deverell might have stepped into his uncle's shoes many years earlier than he could have anticipated in the ordinary course of events.

"Upon my word!" the baronet ejaculated, "this is a very serious business. You are

a very good little girl," he continued, as he hobbled back to the carriage; "a very good little girl indeed. 'Pon my word, we might all have been killed if you hadn't stopped the carriage. My dear," he added, turning to his wife, "we are really very much indebted to this good little girl. I don't know how to thank her."

Her ladyship inclined her portly person from the open doorway of the carriage.

"What is your name, my little girl?" she asked.

"Price, my lady," answered the child. It had dawned upon her that this must be the great lady of whom she had heard so much, and whose return she knew was expected.

"Price, Price?" echoed the baronet. "Any relation to Price the gamekeeper?"

“His daughter, sir, if you please.”

“A very nice little girl indeed,” pursued the baronet. “What are we to do, Wells?” he added, addressing the coachman. “We can’t go on. It is impossible.”

“The only way, Sir Robert, is to go back to the lodge, and drive round by the other road. I think we can just manage to turn here, as the bank sets in a bit.”

“Then we must be quick about it, for it is almost dark now, and the other road, if I recollect rightly, is by no means a good one. You had better get out, my dear, while they turn the carriage.”

By dint of backing the wheels well into the bank, and steadying the horses down the opposite slope for a few feet, the turning was accomplished, and the occupants of the carriage returned to their respective

seats ; the little girl still stood looking on in a sort of wonderment at the whole proceeding.

“ Why, bless my heart, we can’t leave the child there,” the baronet exclaimed.

“ Where are you going, my little girl ?”

“ Home, sir,” the child responded.

“ Is your father still in the same cottage ?”

“ In the cottage the other side of Long Wood, sir ?”

“ Quite so. A mile and a half at least. We can’t let her walk, my dear.”

“ I’m not at all afraid, sir,” said the child, catching the last words.

“ No, but it’s very late to leave you here.”

“ We can take her as far as the lodge,” said my lady.

“ Certainly, certainly ; jump in, my dear.

We really have a great deal to thank you for."

The child timidly entered the carriage, and took her seat opposite the old couple, with much the same sensation Cinderella must have experienced when she stepped into the fairy chariot.

"And so your name is Price, and you are the daughter of Price, the game-keeper."

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"Quite a little lady, I declare. Don't you think so, my dear?"

Whatever her ladyship's thoughts might have been, she evidently did not consider it desirable to express them, or to flatter the child to her face. Men are not so considerate in these matters.

"And where do you go to school?" she

asked, by way of diverting the conversation.

"I have been to school at Sandport, my lady, but I don't go now. Father is so lonely without me now. Mother is dead."

"Oh, your mother is dead, is she?"

"Yes, my lady. She died two years ago."

"Ah, well, you must come and see me up at the house."

Whether her ladyship considered a visit to the house a panacea for all earthly ills, the loss of mothers included, or whether the invitation arose from a kindly desire to see something more of the child who had rendered them so signal a service, we will not pause to inquire. Perhaps the fact of having enjoyed throughout her whole married life all the attention and homage that wealth can command made her regard even the service the child had

rendered as nothing more than her due. Nevertheless, she was really good-hearted, as far as nature and her capacity allowed, and she sympathized with the child in the loss she had sustained by her mother's death.

By this time the lodge was reached, and as the other road to The Towers led in a direction away from the cottage, the child was put down, and a person from the lodge despatched with her to her home.

"Now, don't forget that you are to come and see me," said her ladyship at parting. "Tell your father I say so."

"Yes, my lady," responded Katie, wondering the while how she should ever summon courage to pay the promised visit.

The carriage rolled away, leaving Katie standing with a sort of bewildered feeling

at the remembrance of the occurrences of the last hour. What would her feeling have been could she but have foreseen the ultimate result of that evening's adventures? It would have seemed to her like the wildest dream of romance!

Meanwhile the baronet appeared lost in thought.

"A singularly engaging little girl that. I can't quite make it out. You would never take her for a daughter of Price. She speaks almost as well as you or I do, my dear. Don't you think so?"

Whether Lady Deverell resented this notion does not appear, for she did not condescend to reply. She was accustomed to a certain amount of what she would call "maundering" on the part of her spouse, and had gradually fallen into the way of

not noticing it. It was a philosophic mode of meeting the difficulty, as it saved much disputation, and at the same time allowed a latitude to the baronet which gratified him.

“I wonder if Bolt is back,” he went on, “or whether the Somers’s still have his house. There’s one thing, they never had money to keep up the place properly. The Bolts were always poor ; so, perhaps, they are wise to let. What a miserable business it was, his son turning out so badly. By the way, when will Arthur be down, my dear ?”

“At Christmas, I suppose. How the boy’s grown ! I hardly knew him.”

“A fine boy—a very fine boy. Very like his poor father. But, upon my word, I can’t help thinking of our narrow escape.

We positively might have been killed. You don't seem to realize that, my dear."

"Oh, something or other generally happens to prevent accidents of that sort," Lady Deverell condescended to reply. It was as much as to say that Providence so far respected their wealth and position as to turn aside any casualties which might befall humbler folks ; and, indeed, she had glided so smoothly through life, that there might have been some justification for her belief.



CHAPTER V.

UP AT THE GREAT HOUSE.

“**A**ND so my lady asked you to come and see her, did she, Katie,” said Price for the twentieth time as they sat at breakfast next morning. “Well, yew must put on your best bib and tucker and go up like a lady ; there’s no saying what she mayn’t do for ’ee. Don’t ’ee lose no time about it. I be going up myself to-morrow and yew can go with me.”

“ Oh, father ! I shall be so dreadfully frightened. I wish my lady hadn’t asked me.”

"Nonsense, child. What is there to be frightened at? They won't eat 'ee; besides, after two years' schooling, you can hold your own with the best of 'em. I say yew don't know what it may lead to."

"But I don't want it to lead to anything. I'm very happy here."

"And what's to become of 'ee when I'm dead and gone? Yew can't go on living here alone then."

"Oh, please, don't, father. Pray God that's a long way off yet."

"Well, we'll hope it is, my girl. Same time yew mustn't lose a chance like this, so get yourself ready in the morning, and we'll start early, as I've two or three things to attend to on the way."

The next day was an important epoch in Katie's life. She was up early, having

many little things to attend to before she could start. Breakfast over and her various duties completed, she donned her best hat and mantle, and took her way with the gamekeeper towards the great house, of which, with its inmates, she stood so much in awe.

Price was usually a taciturn man, but on this particular morning he was more taciturn than ever. His thoughts were running upon one subject. Was this accident ordained as a means of bringing Katie into connection with the class to which she properly belonged? Might it not be the means eventually of affording him an opportunity to reveal the secret of her birth without in any way betraying the trust reposed in him by young Bolt? If he saw symptoms of relenting in the grandfather,

if he thought there was a probability of the child's being treated with kindness, he was to make him acquainted with the truth : but how was this knowledge to be arrived at unless the child were brought into connection with the Captain, or Admiral as he now was. Price was a conscientious man, or he would not have attempted to bring about this result. Katie had become to him as his own child. Her sweet disposition and winning ways had been his greatest solace in many a sorrowful hour. She was all in all to him now. Had he consulted his own inclination, the secret which he had guarded so closely for so many years would never have been revealed ; but the strong sense of duty he possessed forbade this, and he felt that the chance must not be lost of giving Katie some insight into the man-

ners and customs of those among whom eventually her lot might be cast.

Even now he could not entirely put away from him the thought that she was something superior to himself and his humble abode. Through all his love and affection for the child there was a sort of deference in his manner which had been noticed by more than one, but which had been ascribed to the fact, as people supposed, of her being an only daughter, and to the unusual beauty and refinement of the child.

It was his sense of duty also which had determined him to send Katie to a superior class of school in Sandport, rather than to one which people in his own rank in life would have chosen. It was thought an unwise act, but it was set down to his great pride in the child ; and the quickness and

aptitude she displayed, together with the rapid advance she made in her studies during the few months of her stay, at once silenced all objectors, and proved that Price had not been so far wrong in his judgment.

The primitive hour at which Price and Katie started brought them to the great house long before my lady had made her appearance at the breakfast-table. Price had some business matters to attend to with the steward, and Katie was left to while away the time as best she might in the housekeeper's room.

After waiting there for upwards of half an hour in a state of considerable trepidation—for it is the anticipation of the plunge, not the plunge itself, which causes us most anxiety—a message came that she was to

go to the morning-room, as her ladyship would be there in a few minutes.

A footman, whose buttons and calves Katie gazed upon with a feeling akin to awe, led her through a realm of wonder to the room in question, and there left her to her own devices.

Perching herself on the extreme end of a couch of flowery chintz, Katie gazed around her with increased amazement. She had never been in the presence of such grandeur as this before.

The room was a very pleasant one, facing the south, and the sunlight was beginning to steal in through the half-lowered blinds, scattering a hundred lights like a broken rainbow from the various prisms and drops of cut glass about the room.

A conservatory opened on the western

side. Its stands were filled with autumn flowers which sent a delicious fragrance through the room ; and on every side vases of the rarest manufacture and design were filled with the same choice blooms, which, mingling harmoniously with the rich mosaics, the elaborate buhl, and the profusion of gilded tracery around, made up a sort of paradise to the eyes of the child, whose utmost notions of grandeur were associated with the best parlour of the school at Sandport.

By-and-by my lady came in. Katie looked up in awe, expecting to find gorgeous silks and satins, and little anticipating the warm shake of the hand with which she was greeted, and the almost homely attire which met her gaze. She began soon to feel quite at her ease with the great lady, who questioned her closely

as to her occupations, her education, and her pursuits, and ended by asking her to read some passages from a favourite book, in which task, though terribly nervous, Katie acquitted herself so creditably that she drew forth the warmest commendations. Then she was told to amuse herself in the conservatory while my lady departed to hold a conference with Price, the result of which filled that honest gamekeeper's heart with many conflicting feelings, and sent him home in so thoughtful a mood that Katie fancied some misfortune must have befallen him, or that poachers were heavy on his mind.

The fact is, Lady Deverell had made a proposition to him, which troubled him more than he liked to admit, even to himself. Like all good-hearted people who

have no family of their own, her ladyship was fond of children. She had taken a great fancy to Katie's winning face and manners on the night when the child had rendered them so signal a service. The questions she had put to her as to her education, her style of reading, and the general intelligence she displayed, convinced her that the child was endowed with an unusual intellect for one in her lowly position. Now that they intended to remain more at Norton Towers, it occurred to her that the girl might be useful to her in many ways; and she preferred having a child about her whom she could train up to her own wishes and ways, rather than an older person who had been accustomed to the habits of other people. In short, her ladyship had proposed to take Katie to live in the house, if

Price were disposed to part with her ; on which point, of course, so great a lady thought he could never hesitate.

To her surprise, however, the proposition failed to elicit the signs of gratification which my lady had looked for ; and, to her still greater surprise, Price informed her, with a profusion of thanks and much stammering and confusion, that he would think the matter over, if her ladyship would let him, and decide in the course of a day or two.

“ The truth is, my lady, the house would be uncommon lonely like without Katie. She’s been a’most everything to me since I buried my poor missus, and it will be hard parting with her.”

My lady was too good-hearted not to admit the force of the argument ; indeed,

she could not but respect the honest game-keeper for the affection he displayed. At the same time, the hesitation came as a kind of rebuff, and a rebuff was a thing so entirely apart from Lady Deverell's experience, that she drew herself up somewhat haughtily.

"But you surely forget the advantage it would be to the child?"

"No, my lady—asking your ladyship's pardon—I know all that, and I can't be too thankful to your ladyship for thinking of the child. It's only come upon me rather sudden like, and if I might have a day or two——"

"Oh, by all means. I would not on any account take her away against your wish; but remember, it is an opportunity she may not have again."

So, as I said before, Price was sorely troubled in his mind as to the course he ought to take. The child had been consigned to him as a solemn trust. Would he, therefore, be justified, under any circumstances, in handing her over to another? And, further, ought he allow the child of young Mr. Bolt to take the place of a dependant, even under such favourable auspices as were now presented? The grandfather, Admiral Bolt, was still absent, and might not return for years. Price could not break his promise by revealing the secret of her birth to Lady Deverell; at the same time, he was too sensible not to be fully alive to the unexceptionable advantages which would accrue from the offer her ladyship had made. Then, on the other hand, his own love for the child

was a mighty weight to set in the balance against prospective advantages ; but he was too conscientious to allow this to influence him wholly, if he felt that his acceptance of the offer would not be inconsistent with the promise made to the dying father. These various reflections were quite sufficient to induce an unusual taciturnity in honest Jim Price during the rest of the evening, and in spite of robust health and his hardy life, to cause him many wakeful hours through the silent watches of the night.

But Providence, which works in such mysterious ways, often cuts the Gordian knot of our temporary difficulties in a manner the least expected. The following day Price received intelligence from one of the under-gamekeepers that their sworn foes, the poachers, had been at work

again, and information was received from a recusant member of the fraternity that a raid on a favourite preserve was to be made, on a large scale, that night.

Organizing his forces, Price laid an ambuscade in the said preserve, at an early hour, with the determination of taking vigorous measures to put a check at once and for ever to the lawless band, who produced the same irritating effect on the gamekeeper's mind as a blister would on his body.

There was a desperate meeting—a bloody fight; five of the poachers were captured, two were carried home badly wounded, but poor Jim Price, who had valiantly led the attack, was carried to a neighbour's cottage, in the grey of the early morning, with a gunshot wound in his side,

which stopped at once and for ever any further debate on the subject of Lady Deverell's offer, and left Katie a second time an orphan.



CHAPTER VI.

A NEW LIFE.

TIM PRICE'S death settled the question with regard to Katie. Some distant relatives of her supposed father would have taken her, it is true, but they evinced no particular desire to do so; and, in spite of her awe of the great lady at the House—which, however, her late interview had tended somewhat to dissipate—she much preferred going there, to being cast upon the charity of people who were almost strangers to her, and who

at once gave up all claim, as soon as they heard Lady Deverell's desire concerning her.

So Katie took up her abode at Norton Towers, and as soon as her grief for her father's death began to abate a little, and the new life at the great house became more familiar, she could not fail to realize the importance of the change which had taken place.

Her sweet disposition, and readiness to oblige, in every little detail, so won upon the baronet and his wife, that before long she began to be treated more like a daughter than a dependant, and the gentleness and unvarying courtesy she displayed towards that usually envious tribe, the domestics, won even their hearts, in spite of the unnecessary fuss, as they regarded

it, which the baronet and his wife made about Jim Price's daughter.

Young Arthur Deverell did not, after all, pay his promised visit at Christmas. He was carried off to the north by some school companion. Before the opportunity again occurred of passing a vacation at Norton, the baronet had grown tired of the place.

"These confounded fogs and east winds play the very dickens with me, my dear," he would say, as he writhed under repeated attacks of rheumatism, lumbago, *et hoc genus omne*. "I shall never be well in this abominable climate. We must try Homburg again."

So to Homburg they went; of course taking Katie with them. Then when the winter approached, instead of venturing

again to encounter the fogs and frosts of home, they turned southward once more, and by the shores of the blue Mediterranean, sought the perpetual sunshine which comes but rarely to bless those whose destiny it is to pass their winters in the British Isles. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at, that those who have no encumbrances and plenty of means, and are, moreover, given to lumbago, should emulate the swallows, and flit when the chilly autumn nights give warning of the discomforts to come.

An attractive villa on the shores of Como at length settled the baronet's mind with regard to a winter abode; and Homburg being indispensable in other seasons, a long interval passed away before they again thought of crossing the narrow strip of sea

which so completely separates us from our continental neighbours.

What a new life thus dawned upon the young girl who had spent all her early years in a little cottage in a remote part of Devon! A new world seemed opened to her. Indeed it was difficult to realize that she had not passed into another planet altogether. Almost every wish was gratified. The old couple now regarded her quite as an adopted child. The best masters were placed at her disposal, and her natural aptitude enabled her to acquire all the most desirable accomplishments with unusual facility. Both the baronet and his wife themselves derived an advantage from these pursuits, for Katie would read and play to them by the hour, and was never tired of adding to their comforts

by various little devices which would never have occurred to them.

Meanwhile, the handsome boy who had spent such a happy day in Jim Price's cottage little dreamed of the fate which had befallen the bright-eyed girl who dwelt so vividly in his memory. The fact of taking the child into her household was of so little importance to Lady Deverell, that she had of course never even mentioned it to Arthur or his mother. There was but little communication between them during the sojourn abroad, and Arthur was too much immersed in the various attractions of college life to trouble himself with inquiries into the domestic arrangements of an uncle and aunt, to whose extensive property he knew he must succeed, but who had been to him somewhat of a myth during his

early childhood, and were almost strangers to him even now,

At length some business which could not be set aside brought Sir Robert and his wife back to England during the London season. It was so long since Lady Deverell had seen London in its gayest garb, that she was seized with a sudden desire to enter into its gaieties once more. She had been a reigning beauty in her time, and her presence was still an important influence in the gay world.

The old family-house in Berkeley Square had been shut up for years. Indeed it was so long since the shutters had been unclosed that a tradition had gone abroad that it was haunted, and small boys of the neighbourhood looked askance at it and

wondered in what part of the premises the ghost was wont to appear.

It was not thought worth while to disturb the repose of the old house for the short time the Deverells proposed remaining in town. A widowed cousin of my lady's, Mrs. Montague Gore, who possessed a bright-looking modern mansion, covered from roof to basement with creepers and scarlet geraniums, had begged them to take up their abode with her. The widow was not one

“ To pull the thorn her brow to braid,
And press the rue for wine.”

She had got over the loss of her husband, some seven years dead; she had no children to absorb her thoughts, and she had nothing to wean her fancies from the round of gaieties she was wont to pursue through-

out the London season. Lady Deverell could not possibly have put herself into better hands after her long isolation from London life, and it was an opportunity for her protégée Katie to be initiated into the marvels of fashionable society at home, which was not to be lost sight of.

It was the commencement of the long vacation, and young Arthur Deverell, on his arrival in town, lost no time in paying his respects to his uncle and aunt. The liberality of the former had always enabled him to indulge in his favourite tastes to an almost unlimited extent, and he arrived at Rutland Gate, a week or two after his relatives' advent in town, on one of the finest-stepping bays that had ever gladdened the eyes of connoisseurs in horseflesh, even in

that wondrous region of equine marvels, the Park.

After a cordial greeting, Arthur settled down into a long chat with his aunt concerning the events of the last five years. In the midst of this there came gliding into the room, with a step as light as the Tennysonian Olivia's, a girl of seventeen, or thereabout. Rich masses of brown hair, innocent of the swindle of puffs and frisettes, wreathed in graceful coils her exquisitely-shaped head. She was in a riding-habit, which displayed to perfection that lithe, undulatory movement of the figure which is indicative of faultless proportions. She hesitated a moment when she saw Arthur, then advanced with a slightly deepened tint in the roses of her cheeks.

"What! not gone yet, Katie? I thought you were to ride with Blanche?" Lady Deverell exclaimed.

"I have been waiting for her, but have just had a note to say she can't come. I am so sorry."

A voice like the gurgle of a stream, with a far-off cadence in it, like the said stream under green leaves.

"How very provoking! Let me see. You don't know Katie, I think," Lady Deverell said, turning to her nephew.

"I have not that pleasure," responded Arthur, bowing low, and wondering who on earth "Katie" could be.

"You must rest content with the groom," continued Lady Deverell; "but perhaps you don't care to ride alone?"

"I confess I do not," said Katie, sitting

down, and looking somewhat disconsolately towards the distant "Row," where the showy horses and bright equipages were flashing among the trees.

"If I may venture to offer myself as an escort," said Arthur a little shyly, "I'm sure I shall be charmed. My horse is here."

"To be sure! Katie will be greatly obliged to you, I know," said her ladyship, answering for her protégée. "It is fortunate you came just at this time. But you will come back and dine with us of course?"

Arthur had another engagement—a very particular one—to dine with a friend at his club. A glance at Katie, however, settled the question.

"I shall be most happy. I want to have a long chat with my uncle. It is such an age

since we met. May I write a note here, aunt?"

He went to a side table and scribbled a hasty excuse to his friend. Ten minutes afterwards he was riding with Katie through the nearest gate leading to the Row.

Two well-dressed men were leaning on the railings looking at the riders. Deverell, junior, was heir to twenty thousand a year, and was already well known in fashionable circles.

"By Jove, what an awfully pretty girl!" exclaims the younger of the two. "Who is she?"

"Don't you know? All London is talking about her. Lady Deverell's protégée, Miss Price. By Jove! what a lucky beggar that young Deverell is! A baronetcy and twenty thousand pounds a year in prospect,

and the prettiest girl in London to console him until he comes into the property."

"He'll make up to her I shouldn't wonder."

"Not he. He'll soar higher. A duke's daughter or something of that sort. He's not half a bad fellow, but awfully proud. I believe, though, he's one of the few whose ancestors really did come over with the Conqueror, and he knows it."

Arthur and his lovely companion passed on all unconscious of the notice they were exciting, and strangely silent. The former was speculating as to whether his aunt had quite abandoned all sense of propriety to start him off alone with a young girl. The latter, who knew he was coming, recognised him at once, although some six years had passed since his visit to her father's cottage.

She was wondering whether he would recognise her, and, although far above the petty pride of being ashamed of her birth, she had sense enough to feel that the knowledge of who she was must come upon him as a startling surprise, even if it failed to awaken a more disagreeable feeling. As to Lady Deverell, considering that she had grown to look upon Katie almost as her own daughter, it seemed to her the most natural thing in the world to start her off with her nephew, utterly forgetting that he did not even know his companion's name.

Arthur was by no means inclined to grumble at his fate. He considered himself "in luck," and he could not fail to be conscious of the admiration his companion excited. "What a square seat she has !

What a light hand ! What a figure, and what eyes !” he mentally exclaimed, as he stole a sidelong glance at her. “It’s awfully absurd to be riding with her here without even knowing her name. I must make a shot at it.”

“Are you staying long in town ?” he asked.

“As long as Lady Deverell does. I believe that will be some weeks.”

“Then you are staying with my aunt ?”

“Of course.”

She had looked up at the question in some surprise, but dropped her eyes again before the young man’s ardent gaze.

“Why the dickens does she say ‘of course ?’” exclaimed Arthur to himself, but he had no time to speculate, as his companion went on.

"Don't you know that I am living with Lady Deverell? She has been so kind to me."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Arthur, wondering still more in what capacity so lovely a creature could be living with his aunt.

"You don't seem to remember me," Katie went on. "I knew *you* at once, but——"

There she stopped suddenly. Arthur was beginning to feel foolish. It was quite impossible that he could have met this lovely girl before. He *must* have remembered it.

"I—I—really, I am very stupid—but I don't recollect meeting you before. But surely if I had I—I couldn't have forgotten it."

Katie was beginning to look confused

also. She was too genuine, however, to sail under false colours ; so she made up her mind to put herself on a right footing with her companion at once.

“Don’t you remember, about six years ago, coming to the gamekeeper’s cottage at Norton Towers, one fine spring morning ?”

She was absently smoothing her horse’s mane with her gold-mounted whip as she put the question, and her face was somewhat averted. The truth was as far from Arthur’s thoughts as ever.

“Yes, perfectly,” he answered, in some surprise. “That day is among my pleasantest recollections. I was quite a boy then, but everything was so bright, and fresh, and sunny, that I have never forgotten it. But what has that to do with you ?”

"Only that I was the little girl who brought you the cider on that occasion."

"You ! impossible !"

He fairly pulled up in the middle of the road, almost causing a wealthy tailor, who was rushing full tilt down the ride, with his toes very much turned out, and a generally loose seat, to come to utter grief.

Katie went on hurriedly.

"It is perfectly true, I assure you. My dear father was killed—shot in a poaching fray. Lady Deverell and Sir Robert were so kind to me. I have lived with them ever since. I owe everything to them."

She suppressed the fact of the signal service she had rendered them on the night of their return. Like all really unselfish persons, she remembered only the obliga-

tions she was under to others. Arthur sat his horse in utter bewilderment.

"And you really mean to tell me that you are Katie," he said, at length.

"Yes, Katie Price," she answered, not making the slightest attempt to ignore her somewhat plebeian surname.

"Well, I'm awfully glad to see you again, any way. I've so often thought of that happy day. But how very odd that my aunt never told me."

"You have had so little communication with them. You declined coming to Montreux when we were there, you know."

"Strictly between ourselves, I thought it would be horribly slow. I had not the remotest notion *you* were with them."

In spite of the implied compliment, there was a sort of constraint in his tone. "This

exquisite creature Jim Price the keeper's daughter!" he was mentally ejaculating. "I wonder if everybody knows it."

With intuitive sensitiveness, Katie detected the tone. She wished she had not come out with him. For the last year or two, ever since she had begun to expand into womanhood, she had been made almost an idol of abroad. The renowned beauty, the adopted daughter of the wealthy Deverells, had been courted and flattered to an extent which might have excused a certain amount of vanity in her. More than once she had refused an alliance with scions of some of the noblest families abroad. In experience of men and manners, in knowledge of foreign countries, of the fine arts, and of general topics, she was far in advance of her companion. In some remote corner

of her heart, moreover, there had always lain perdu a lingering feeling of admiration for the handsome boy who had come so unexpectedly upon her father's cottage, in those days, now so long gone by that they seemed more like a dream of the past than absolute realities. With the recollection of these things in her mind, she could not resist the slight feeling of resentment which rose up as she detected Arthur's altered tone.

"Shall we go on faster?" she said, touching her horse's shoulder lightly with the whip.

The animal bounded forward. Arthur had no choice but to follow ; and, with the increased pace, and the gathering crowd of equestrians, the opportunity for further conversation, except by snatches, was lost.



CHAPTER VII.

AN EVENING AT RUTLAND GATE.

IN spite of his unconscious coolness at the revelation of Katie's obscure origin, Arthur Deverell possessed a warm, generous nature. In our artificially constituted society we must all, more or less, bow to the exigencies of caste, and Arthur had a sufficient sense of the responsibilities of his future position to know that it would not be altogether a wise thing for him to fall in love with a keeper's daughter. Katie had attracted him, even in this first

interview, to an extent which he hardly liked to confess even to himself, but there was no mischief done yet, and he felt that it would be desirable to put a check upon himself in his future intercourse with her.

Mrs. Montagu Gore was not given to dining alone. When she did not dine out, she liked to entertain people at her own table, and no one could do it better. She possessed that most desirable of all qualities, tact, to an almost unlimited extent. By dint of it, she drew people to her table that many a titled person would have given their ears to have captured. The legs of royal dukes had stretched themselves beneath her damask. She had entertained half a dozen ambassadors and foreign ministers, and addressed them all in their own language. The great lights in art, science,

and literature professed to gain further enlightenment at her brilliant table; and she achieved all this on an income which a less skilful manager would not have deemed sufficient wherewith to start a brougham.

“I’m told the pheasants are running about like chicken at Norton Towers, Sir Robert,” said Val Poingdestre, after the ladies had gone to the drawing-room. “Wouldn’t it be a charity to thin them out a bit ?”

Val was the younger son of an ancient house, and as a natural consequence clever and needy. He always had an eye to business, and to sport.

“I must leave them to the tender mercies of Arthur and his friends. He intends to have a shooting party

there in the autumn, and will, no doubt, be glad to see you."

"But you'll shoot yourself?"

The baronet fairly laughed out. "I've not walked a quarter of a mile for six years," he said.

"Have you tried?" persisted Val.

"I can't say I have. My confounded rheumatism prevents me."

"I should recommend riding to hounds," remarked Val quietly.

"Riding to what?" roared the baronet. "By Jove, sir, do you wish me to commit suicide?"

"By no means. I'm only giving you the advice Brooks gave the governor. You know Brooks affects Abernethy. 'I want to consult you, Dr. Brooks,' said my father. 'I recommend you to consult Dr. Horse,

said Brooks. 'But I couldn't mount a horse to save my life,' said my father. 'Then get a couple of men to put you up, or half a dozen if two are not enough,' said the doctor. The governor went away in a huff, but I persuaded him to try. It took three of us to get him mounted, and we made him ride a mile, in spite of his groans, which I must admit were appalling. The next day, we got him up again, and he rode two, the next four, the next eight, and now he rides to hounds as straight as I do, though he's sixteen stone to an ounce."

"There, uncle, you can't refuse to try after that experience," said Arthur. "You can go south after the shooting, just as well as before."

"Why, you young dog, are you, too, in

league against me ? No, you must manage to get on without me."

"People say you've deserted the place altogether, Deverell," said a noble lord, who had a place in the neighbourhood of Norton ; "you really ought to look us up now and then."

"Well, well ! I'll see what Gull says about it to-morrow, and if he doesn't order me off——"

"You'll stay for the shooting," chimed in Val. "We shall consider it a settled thing then. I know the doctor won't object."

"Don't be too sure of that," said the baronet, who was somewhat of a *malade imaginaire*. "I'm sure my lady will be opposed to it."

"That remains to be seen, uncle. My opinion is she will like it."

With this they went to the drawing-room.

Arthur slipped in before any of the rest, and went straight to his aunt.

"Aunt, do try and persuade my uncle to stay at Norton for the shooting this year. He is half inclined to do so."

Lady Deverell's eyes opened very wide, indeed.

"Half inclined to stay at Norton for the shooting? Impossible!"

"He is, indeed. He went so far as to say he would be guided by Gull's opinion. I hope you do not dislike it."

"I should like it of all things. I'm tired to death of constantly living abroad."

"Well, do attack him on the subject. Here he is."

Lady Deverell knew her husband far too well to encourage him in anything she

wished him to do. Is it gout or what which renders most men of sixty so obstinate ?

“So you think of staying at Norton for the shooting, Arthur tells me.”

“I am thinking of no such thing. I should be out of my senses to dream of such a thing.”

“I was just thinking so. I’m sure it would never do for you.”

Now it so happened that the more the idea revolved in Sir Robert’s mind the more he liked it. This opposition of his wife’s naturally made him still more in favour of it. He went suddenly round.

“I don’t see what reason you have to say that. In fact, now I think of it, I’m not sure that I shan’t turn it over in my mind, and if Gull don’t object—”

"I'm sure he *will* object," my lady put in adroitly.

"I'm not so certain he will," the baronet answered testily. "At any rate, I shall ask him."

"I believe my uncle has made up his mind, Poingdestre," said Arthur crossing to where the originator of the scheme stood talking to Mrs. Montagu Gore.

Several people had dropped in, for the gay mistress of the house was "at home" on this particular evening. There was quite a brilliant assembly.

Arthur glanced round the room for Katie, whom he had taken in to dinner. He was forgetting his resolve already. The young lady in question was carrying on a warm discussion with a renowned German diplomatist in his own language. She hardly

appeared to notice Arthur's approach. He felt somewhat at a discount, for like most young men of the day, he was bad at languages. Women are ten times as quick in picking them up.

"Sing something, Katie," said the hostess; "we're all dying to hear you."

"Certainly, if it will arrest any fatal results," said Katie, rising quietly, and going to the piano.

"May it be 'Sei still mein Herz,'" said the diplomatist, who, like all Germans, was musical. "It was so very charming the other night."

"I have a new one of Kucken's, 'Ach kann ich's sagen.' I know you will like it."

"Ah, yes, I know it is quite charming."

The next moment the singer's voice was thrilling the room with the most tender

pathos. Not only was she an accomplished musician, but the true artist feeling was there, causing the acquired facility, perfect as it was, to become quite a secondary matter in comparison with the intense feeling of the singer. People stopped talking, and turned to listen, a proof of something uncommon in these days, when music is the signal for talking.

"Superb!" said a well-known French artist, coming up to the piano as she concluded. "Will you not give us something of Sullivan's? He is your great song writer—so good—so original."

"With pleasure. What shall it be? 'Oh Ma Charmante'?" she suggested, as a compliment to the artist's nationality.

"Ah, yes!" he answered, with a beaming smile, "that is delightful."

Again the voice sent its exquisite cadence through the room. Quite a small crowd gathered round. At the conclusion of the song, there was a burst of applause. It was not the power of the singer which touched them so. In a public hall, the voice would have sounded poor and thin possibly, but the intense feeling and perfect taste penetrated every heart.

Katie was the centre of attraction from that moment. Arthur could not believe his eyes, his ears. Was it possible that six years could have transformed the little cottage girl into this cynosure of a fashionable assembly in the great metropolis? It seemed incredible. Yet such may be the result of training and talent combined.

Arthur was fond of music in a certain sense, but his taste had never been directed

to the higher class of composers. Beethoven would bore him insufferably, and Bach send him to sleep. "Does she never sing anything but French and German, I wonder?" he said to himself as he stood watching her at the conclusion of her last song.

She had risen from the piano, and stood talking to the Frenchman with the same fluency she had exhibited with her German. It was all so modestly done too, without the slightest thought of display. This one admirable quality, naturalness, seemed to be her leading characteristic.

Arthur was feeling his inferiority more and more, and it nettled him.

"It is difficult to get in a word, Miss Price," he said, abruptly. "I want to ask you to sing an English song."

She looked up at him with the sweetest look of compliance in her eyes.

"What would you like?" she said, seating herself at once.

"I must leave that to you."

She thought a moment, and then commenced Spohr's exquisite melody, "Rose softly blooming."

Arthur stood entranced.

Nothing more beautiful in the way of melody than this song has ever issued from the mind of a composer. It seems to be literally the outflowing of the man's soul, and the singer on this occasion seemed to read the author's intention perfectly. There was not a breath, not the rustle of a garment throughout the room as the last cadence died away.

"What a marvel that girl is!" said the

noble lord before referred to, as he leaned against the doorway with Val Poingdestre. "She'll make a good match I should say."

"If she's that way disposed," remarked Val, dryly: "she may be difficult to please."

"Wasn't she the daughter of a tinker, or something of that sort?" asked a pale-eyed young man, whose grandfather had risen from the ranks to the woolsack.

"If I thought so, I'd turn tinker to-morrow," quoth Val; "but it's not true. Her father belonged to the Woods and Forests Department, and had a shooting-box near Norton Towers."


"Oh, indeed!" said the young man, with prolonged wonder.

My lord turned away to conceal a smile.

Val's countenance was perfectly immovable.

The next day it was currently reported that Miss Price's father had been a Commissioner of Woods and Forests, and was an old friend of Sir Robert's.

The conversation became general after Katie's songs. A group gathered round her. The last new opera singer was discussed ; the new tragedian, and the Royal Academy. Then followed a comparison of English and foreign art ; the ancient masters, and the grand foreign galleries were discussed. Arthur felt bored. He knew nothing of these things. In a winning eight-oar, in a pigeon match, in a straight line across country, he felt his superiority ; but here, in Mrs. Montagu Gore's brilliant drawing-room, he was out of the running



altogether. The clever hostess, whom nothing escaped, took in the situation at once.

"Arthur, my friend," she said, as he wished her good-night, "you must come to Rome with me in the winter, and get a month or two at Florence and Venice. Now that you have left college, you have your education to *commence*."

Val and young Deverell strolled home together.

"By the way, Arthur, Lawrence says he'll let you have the mare for three hundred. It's a long price; I shouldn't advise you to buy."

"Well, I don't know. I like the mare, and I managed to pull off a trifle on the Oaks. I think I'll take her."

"You're beginning early, young man."

Remember the fate of the Marquis the other day."

"Oh, never fear. I shan't go beyond my tether. Anyhow, tell Lawrence I'll have the mare."



CHAPTER VIII.

ACROSS COUNTRY.

SO far from objecting to the baronet's sojourn at Norton, his doctor strongly recommended it, and advised as much exercise as he could get. The consequence was that a shooting party was established at the Towers in the fall of the year, and the pheasants were dropping like brown leaves in the prolific coverts which stretched over miles of country around.

There was to be a great meet of the

hounds soon after their arrival, and Katie was to make her first essay across country. There was a discussion the previous evening at dinner as to what she should ride.

“Try my mare,” said Arthur. “She’s as easy as a cradle, has the tenderest mouth in the world, and carries a lady beautifully.”

“Arthur had an eye to business when he invested in that mare, evidently,” said Poingdestre, looking slyly across the table at him. “I was going to offer you my horse, Miss Price, but it’s a great bony brute, and you can’t do better than ride the mare. She’s so clever at her fences, I shouldn’t be surprised if you pound us all.”

“I have no intention of exhibiting myself in that way,” answered Katie. “I gladly accept Mr. Deverell’s offer, but you must not expect me to attack the fences just yet.”

"I assure you there is not the slightest difficulty," urged Arthur. "You have only to let the mare have her own way, and she'll carry you over everything. A child might ride her. She never flies her banks. She tops them like a cat, and drops on the other side as lightly as a bird. I've even known her to check herself on the top, and pick a sound place to drop. I bought her chiefly for her Devonshire training, though she's equally clever in the grass countries."

"Really I shall begin to think there is a chance of being in at the death with such a mount," said Katie.

"By no means unlikely, if I may judge by your style of riding in the Park," said Val; "that is, if you'll only follow me," he added.

"I shall put her under your charge, Mr.

Poingdestre," said my lady; "and I do hope you will both be very careful. I always so dread an accident."

"My *dear* Lady Deverell," remonstrated Val, "did you *ever* know me come to grief? You do me a cruel injustice."

He put on such an air of injured innocence, that everybody laughed. The fact is, Val did everything so quietly that he was thought the most prudent fellow in the world, whereas he was really one of the most dare-devil men living. Not half a dozen riders in Devonshire would take the same line across country with him, and yet he took it all with such consummate ease that he never appeared to be doing anything extraordinary, and he never boasted. Indeed, he was already beginning to be thought a quiet, elderly "party," and was

considered quite a sufficient escort for a young lady, though he was in fact only just turned thirty.

Val was magnificently mounted. Small as his means were, whatever he had was always of the best. He brought his horse down from London on purpose for the hunting, as the baronet, on account of his repeated absences, had but a scratch lot in his stables. Arthur had, however, persuaded him to buy one or two likely-looking hunters, which they found in the neighbourhood, and the best of these he selected for himself.

The owner of the hounds was one of the oldest sportsmen of the county. He always hunted them himself, and it was a treat to a brother sportsman to see him do it. It was the one thought, the one occupation of

his life, and he brought to bear upon it an amount of experience and a loving zeal, which carried the art—for art it is—to perfection.

It may seem a pity that a man should devote a lifetime to so ignoble a purpose ; but we cannot all be Shakespeares or Michael Angelos, and probably the worthy master of hounds had no brains to excel in any higher pursuit. Besides, whatever the future may bring, as society is at present constituted, somebody *must* hunt hounds, and, if it must be done, it is better that it should be done well. I myself believe that the day will come when “sport,” as we are pleased to call it, will be looked upon as a thing of the past. The tendency is all that way. Whether man will be better without it is an open question, but that the

brute *will*, there can be no manner of doubt. To live unhunted, and be killed quickly, without unnecessary torture, would be a millennium to the long-suffering brute creation. If dominion were suddenly transferred to them, and they indulged only in *just* reprisals, I wonder how mankind would fare ?

But there is one sight which might tempt even worthy Mr. Colam into the hunting field, and that is a pretty woman well mounted, cantering to cover across a breezy down, on a bright autumn morning. Such a sight was Katie, as they went easily across the open to Long Wood. Val Poingdestre was by her side, on his splendid brown hunter, whose long swinging trot kept him evenly by the side of his companion. Arthur had gone on before, with Sir Harry

Selby, the master of the hounds. Perhaps there was a slight tinge of jealousy in his mind, arising from the fact that Katie had been placed under Val's protection, instead of his own; but he would not confess the feeling even to himself.

Val and his companion drew up at the cover side, where there was already a somewhat extensive group of riders of both sexes. The Honourable and Rev. Vicar of the parish, who never hunted less than three days a week, and by his bonhomie made it appear a virtue in the eyes of his parishioners, rode up to Val. A lady, well mounted, with a graceful figure, but somewhat plain face, was with him.

"Morning, Miss Price,—morning, Poingdestre; famous weather for hunting. Let me make you known to my niece, Miss Vereker."

Katie bowed, Val raised his hat; the vicar's horse immediately commenced a *pas seul* on his hind legs for the edification of the field. The pillar of the Church, however, was equal to the occasion, and soon brought his steed to his senses.

"Are you fond of hunting?" said Miss Vereker to Katie.

"I really don't know. This is my first appearance in the hunting field. I have not the least idea how I shall get on."

"Will you keep with us? The vicar has promised to look after me, and he knows the country thoroughly."

"Thanks very much, but I have put myself under Mr. Poingdestre's care. I am to follow him."

"You've your work cut out for you then," said the vicar with a significant smile.

There was no time for more. Sir Harry's eye was the first to detect the fox sneaking out of the cover, and going away towards the downs as fleet as the wind.

The old sportsman came through the bushes like a thunderbolt. It was something to hear his "gone away" ring along the cover side. By twos, threes, and fours the hounds came plunging through the underwood. There was a rapid twisting of horses, a wild shout or two from the whips, and then all were going away at top speed down a slight hill towards a stream in the meadows below.

"The fox is heading towards Beacon Hill. There's a stiff piece of work before us," said the vicar.

"Sit close and don't be afraid of the

water, Miss Price; the mare will take it in her stride," cried Val.

Katie was across almost before she thought about it, and going up the incline on the other side stride for stride with Val. Arthur was riding somewhat in the rear. That it was intentional on his part was evident by the way he kept his horse in hand.

They crossed two or three open fields, divided by low fences, and then came to a bit of level with a stiff Devonshire bank at the far end. The vicar, who knew every gap and gate, edged away with his party to the right. Val went straight for the bank.

"Follow me, Miss Price, and let your mare have her head."

The bank was high and wide, and some brushwood on the top made it look still more formidable. In spite of her con-

fidence in her leader Katie could not help feeling a little nervous. "Are you sure I can jump it?" she cried, with a slight trepidation in her voice.

"Yes, without the least difficulty if you don't flurry the mare. It's not half as formidable as it looks."

Val shot ahead, clearing a pathway through the brush on the top. The next moment Katie felt herself lifted with a heave like that of an ocean wave. She was on the top, with a deep drop on the other side, which looked formidable; but the mare dropped as Arthur had said, as lightly as a bird.

"Well done!" cried Val, as she came alongside him again. "You'll take them all quietly after that. By Jove, this is becoming exciting. About the quickest thing

I've known for some time. Ha, ha, ha! there's the vicar pounded as I live; won't that be a joke against him? Do you see, they've walled up that gap and baulked him."

Katie, however, was too much occupied with the work before her. The mare was getting warm, and in the excitement seemed to have lost its tender mouth, and was pulling frantically.

"There are two more come to grief," cried Val, as they crossed another fence. "We shall drop the ruck presently, then we shall begin to enjoy ourselves."

Twenty minutes of this sort of work thinned the field. The hounds were going very fast, so much so that it was almost impossible, from the close country, to keep well up with them. Val had settled down

to his work. A sort of demon seemed to possess him at these times, and he would have ridden at a church if it stood in his way. Katie had acquitted herself so well up to this time that he miscalculated her powers. The pace was now tremendous, and there was a fence before them which looked more formidable than any Katie had yet encountered. Val was going straight, as usual.

Suddenly, Arthur ranged up by her side. Had he been following her all this time? she wondered. Val was ten yards ahead.

"For heaven's sake don't try that jump, Miss Price," Arthur said in a hurried tone. "Poingdestre rides magnificently, but he doesn't know the country as well as I do. There's a ditch as wide as a house on the other side."

"What am I to do?" cried Katie.

"Edge away to the right, there's a gate yonder; we shall come up with the hounds almost as quickly that way."

Val was on the top of the bank. He took in the situation at a glance, and in the brief moment at his disposal raised his hand, and shouted, "Go back!" then he disappeared on the other side. Katie felt she had had an escape.

"Thank you so much," she said, turning her bright eyes on Arthur; "but you will think me a dreadful nuisance. Do go on without me."

"We shan't lose much time, and I think it quite possible Val has come to grief," Arthur answered, leading towards a gate which was now seen in the bank to the right. "Can you jump timber?"

"I think I had better not try this time," said Katie; "it looks rather formidable.

Arthur pulled up, and had the gate open in an instant. Passing through he held it back with the handle of his hunting-whip.

"Now quick!" he cried, "we shall cut them off at the bottom of the next field. Hallo! you sir, mind where you are coming. Good God! what are you about?"

A vulgar-looking young man on a big-boned horse was coming obliquely at the gate from the opposite corner of the field. The hard-mouthed animal was going like the wind, throwing up a cloud of turf from his clumsy heels. Right at the open gateway he came, just as Katie was in the opening. There was a violent collision; Katie was knocked clean out of her saddle

into a cluster of soft herbage by the bank-side, while the clumsy horseman cannoned against Arthur, almost losing his seat.

Red anger flushed into Arthur's cheek. His eyes flashed, he raised his heavy cane and brought it down with tremendous force upon the shoulders of the discomfited horseman.

"Confound you for a blundering fool!" he cried savagely; "you might have killed the lady."

The other raised his whip as if to return the blow, then checked himself with a sudden effort.

"I'll remember that, Mr. Deverell," he said, with a malicious scowl; "I was about to apologize to the lady, but she doesn't seem very much hurt."

He rode away without another word,

but with a look in his face not pleasant to behold. Meanwhile Katie had risen, looking a little bit shaken, but not seriously injured by her fall. Arthur was by her side in a moment, doing his best to hold the two horses, which were mad with impatience to get on.

At this moment the vicar appeared on the scene.

"Not much damaged, I hope, Miss Price," he cried, as he pulled up.

"No, I'm not hurt a bit," Katie answered, laughing; "thanks to the ferns I came down soft."

"Who was that fellow?" Arthur demanded; his face still glowing with passion.

"Young Bulfinch, the lawyer's son. He'll kill somebody one of these days. He's

killed half a dozen hounds already, by riding over them. He takes care to give Sir Harry a very wide berth, I promise you."

"Well, he'll carry the mark of my whip to-day, any way," said Arthur, "and he shall have it again if I come across him."

"Why, did you strike him?"

"Yes, I did."

"That's a pity," said the man of peace. "His father is your uncle's local solicitor."

"I can't help that. He shouldn't come out if he can't manage a horse. What's become of your niece?"

"She's had enough of it, and has gone back with my lord. Excuse me, I only waited to see if you were all right—au revoir."

Away went the plucky vicar, down the

field and over the fence at the bottom, while Arthur helped Katie to remount. She placed her neat little foot in his hand and with his strong arm he lifted her into the saddle. Mounting his own horse he sat and looked at her, inquiringly.

"What's become of my escort?" asked Katie. "You thought he had come to grief."

"I ought to have known him better. Yonder he goes, close up with Sir Harry. By Jove, what a pace!"

"Quiet, now, quiet!" he exclaimed, as his horse tugged impatiently at the bit. "We are hopelessly thrown out, I fear."

"Oh, I am so sorry. It is all my fault. Is there no chance of your overtaking them?"

"What, and leave you here?"

"Oh, I don't in the least mind. I shall get on somehow."

"You don't feel up to going on?"

"I really don't think I could. I must confess to feeling a little shaken."

"Of course. I was a brute for suggesting it. That confounded fellow has spoilt your day. Come then, we'll go home quietly."

"You're sure you don't mind?"

"Quite sure."



CHAPTER IX.

DOWN THE LANES.

IT would be difficult to define the terms upon which Arthur and Katie Price had lived during the last three months. They had been very constantly together, but they scarcely seemed to be on a more familiar footing than they were on that first evening at Rutland Gate.

Katie's sensitive nature had never quite got over the sudden coolness which young Deverell had exhibited when he discovered

who she was. Deverell, on the other hand, had been so impressed with his own inferiority in those subjects most in accordance with Katie's tastes, that he never for a moment imagined she could feel any particular interest in him. The amount of attention she commanded from people of all ranks in life, wherever she went, had long ago banished from his mind all sense of inferiority in her. Indeed he looked upon her as something very far superior to himself. The memory of her former humble position vanished before the present attractions of her beauty and accomplishments, and he had grown to look with envy on those whose tastes seemed more congenial with her own, and which appeared to put them at once on a footing of intimacy which he himself never seemed able to attain.

They had left the fields, and were going down a narrow, winding lane, with banks on either side, overshadowed by tall elms. Quite a thick layer of leaves was already beneath their feet, but the rich ferns, which grow so luxuriantly on these Devonshire banks, still spread their fronds of cool green beneath the trees; and so remote and sheltered was the spot, that the dew still lay upon the cobwebs which laced the ferns together in their fairy meshes.

"I'm so vexed to think that fellow has spoilt your day," said Arthur. "You might literally have been in at the death."

"It really doesn't matter in the very remotest degree," answered Katie. "I think this is a great deal better," she added, pointing to the wealth of foliage on either side.

"I see you despise sport."

"You quite mistake me. It is only that I don't know enough about it to enjoy it thoroughly. I liked the scamper over hedges and ditches this morning, but I am not sorry it is over. I am only sorry for you."

"Oh, I get quite enough of it, one way and another—too much perhaps," he added a little bitterly.

"Too much, in what way?"

"Oh, I don't know. The truth is, Miss Price, I used to think myself an awfully clever fellow at College, because I could pull a better oar, or ride straighter than most men; but lately, somehow, I've had the conceit taken out of me. I find there are higher things than these, that I know nothing about. If I must speak the truth,

I always have the impression that you must think me an utter ignoramus."

Katie turned crimson. "Mr. Deverell, how can you accuse me of any such injustice?"

"Do you mean to say you don't?"

"I mean to say that such an idea never crossed my mind."

"Then how is it you never encourage me to talk to you? Forgive my saying it, but I cannot help noticing that with a different class of men—fellows fond of art, music, science, and that sort of thing, you talk away no end, and seem quite at home with them. While with me—well, now we are on the subject, I may as well make a clean breast of it—when I attempt to talk to you, there is something in your manner,—a coldness, a restraint which makes me

feel—absurd as it may seem—positively shy.”

Katie kept her eyes bent upon the ground, but there was a world of emotion in her face.

“Mr. Deverell, do you think you attribute my constraint to the right cause? Have you never given me ground for it?”

“Not that I remember, on my honour. If I have, will you tell me in what way?”

“No, I would rather not.”

“But, surely, if I have inadvertently annoyed you, you will at least do me the justice to believe it *was* inadvertence, and will give me the chance of setting myself right.”

“It cannot matter to you very much, one way or the other.”

“But indeed it does. Your refusal will

pain me more than—more than you perhaps imagine.”

“I should be very sorry to give you pain,” she said, softly, with her eyes still bent down.

“Then you will tell me?”

“Since you press it, I will, for I always like to be straightforward. Do you remember that day, when we first rode together in the Park?”

“Perfectly—I am not likely to forget it.”

Before I tell you what you want to know, I must refer to my own feeling on that occasion. You remember we had met before. We had been so happy as children on that one day we spent together, that I felt quite a child’s delight in meeting you again—I thought——”

She stopped abruptly, and bent her head still lower.

"Well," said Deverell, anxiously.

"I thought perhaps—but the thought was a very silly one—that you might have felt the same pleasure in meeting me again."

"I told you I did. I distinctly remember my telling you so."

"You told me so with your lips, but the truth was, Mr. Deverell, your manner changed to me from the moment you heard my name. I am not surprised. It was but natural, and I was to some extent prepared for it, but—"

"I was a dolt, an idiot, a conceited coxcomb," broke in Arthur. "But you still do me an injustice. The feeling did not last an hour. You must remember

that it came upon me as such a sudden surprise. Your look, tone, manner, made me think that you were a person of the very best position. I did not know then—how could I? that you had qualities of mind and heart which placed you far above the accident of humble birth. Surely I have made ample amends for my folly since?”

“But that is just the point. You never have been really cordial to me since. I am very sensitive, and I can assure you it has pained me much, though I never thought to confess it.”

“But I have told you the true cause. On my honour, from that first evening I spent in your society, I have kept aloof entirely from a sense of my own inferiority. Will you not believe me?”

"I must believe you, but it was a very foolish feeling—especially with me. You must see that I could make no advances while I was under that impression, and you do not know how humble I am myself—how prone I am to that most painful of all feelings, self-depreciation."

"You! with a thousand worshippers at your feet—with a mind that all must envy?"

"Oh, Mr. Deverell! you only pain me by talking in that way. The kindness of your uncle and aunt put me in the way of picking up a certain amount of superficial knowledge; a smattering of languages, a little music, and a vague knowledge of art. Believe me, there is little real knowledge in the slang of art which falls so glibly from the lips of those who have spent a

large portion of their lives among the great masters. To have done one really great or good action, to have made some solid sacrifice for the good of mankind, would be worth all the accomplishments I possess a thousand times over."

Arthur turned upon her a look of admiration so intense that it was well she did not encounter it just then.

"It is a comfort, any way, that you don't think me an absolute dolt. They say confession is good for the soul. Perhaps we shall get on better after this."

"I hope so. It will be a great pleasure to me if we do. If you still think I do not appreciate you, I will tell you plainly what I should have before thought it great presumption in me to express. I think you have a great many noble qualities. You

are very honourable, brave, and strong. You would shine quite as much as my dilettante friends, whom you profess to envy — though even now I can hardly think you serious—if you only had the opportunity of judging for yourself, and that opportunity you will have very soon, for you will go abroad with us, will you not ?”

“ I had made up my mind not to do so, but this tête-a-tête—the first real one we have had—has wrought a marvellous change in me. I assure you I feel as if a load were taken off my mind. I shall be delighted to go now, and shall get you to be my teacher.”

Somehow the world seemed sunnier to both of them, after they had thus unburthened their hearts. If Arthur had read

Tennyson, he would have realized the feeling of Maud's lover.

“A livelier emerald twinkles in the grass,
A purer sapphire melts into the sea.”

Probably they neither of them yet knew their own hearts, still they each experienced an indefinable happiness in the other's society; and as they pursued their way slowly down the sweet Devonshire lane not for one moment did they envy Val or Sir Harry the triumphs which they had probably ere now achieved.

They reached a point where the road forked; the one to the right leading down towards a wood, which lay in the valley.

Katie checked her horse, and gazed round her for a moment. Her companion stopped also.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, noticing her wistful expression.

"Oh, don't you see! Surely you must remember this lane. How familiar it looks. It leads down to my dear father's cottage."

It was indeed the turn of the road near the lincay, which has been mentioned in the opening chapter of this story. Arthur remembered the spot too. He had ridden past it often in former years.

"What would you wish to do?" he asked, partly reading her thoughts.

"I should so like to go there. Would it be troubling you very much?"

"You must know I should not consider it a trouble, if you wish it. But it will awaken sad recollections."

"Not altogether—those were very happy

days—my dear father was so good to me. I could not expect them to last for ever.”

They turned into the winding lane, and pursued their way in silence through the copse to the gate of the cottage. The flowers were still bright in the garden, and some rosy-cheeked children were playing in the long grass which lay between the garden and the wood. They stared in half-frightened amazement at the beautiful lady and the tall gentleman on horseback, who had so suddenly appeared on the scene, and one, the eldest, ran quickly across the garden into the cottage.

What a change since Arthur had come to the cottage, on that bright spring morning, years ago ! What a change, especially to Katie ! The transformation from the little country girl to the accomplished,

fashionable beauty, who had seen half the London world at her feet! Happily, her prosperity had not changed her heart. Though her path had been one of roses, almost without a thorn, her heart still yearned to the quiet cottage home, and the memory of the happy days she had passed in it with her supposed father. She turned away her face, to hide the tears that *would* force their way at the remembrance.

An honest-looking woman came to the door, and stared at them, inquiringly.

"I wonder if she would mind our coming in," said Kate; "I should so like to see the dear little room again, where I used to sit and work and sing the whole day long. There is the same honeysuckle round the window, now."

"So should I," answered Arthur. "It was there I had that jolly meal—the delicious cream and honey. Yonder is the very stump upon which I sat when you brought me the cider, Katie!"

He had never called her by her Christian name before, though their early intimacy, and the position she occupied in his uncle's house would have warranted it. She turned quickly at the sound, and he went on.

"Katie, there ought to be a very strong bond between your heart and mine. We will never let estrangement come between us again, will we?"

"Never, if I can help it," she said.

Her head was bent down, and the words came falteringly. Was it beginning to dawn upon her, that the feeling which had never quite left her heart since the day when they

met here before, was now reciprocated? She did not shape the thought to herself even yet. It was only an indefinite sensation trembling across her mind : the first tender sensation of love, as tremulous as the dew-drop on the rose.

The woman advanced to the gate, and asked what they might please to want.

"Would you allow us to come into your cottage?" said Arthur. "We both knew it well many years ago, and should be so much obliged if you will."

"Ees sure, ef so be it will give 'ee any pleasure, but you must plaze to 'scuse its being a bit untidy. 'Tes one body's work to kip it nate, with such a parcel of children about."

Katie assured her that it did not in the least matter, and into the old familiar room

they went, leaving the horses in charge of a sturdy boy, who had been captured from behind the cottage. Then Katie took off her hat, and the good woman brought her some refreshing new milk, while Arthur indulged in a jug of his favourite cider. They had a long chat with the game-keeper's wife, touching her husband (who now occupied Jim Price's post) and her numerous family, and left some substantial tokens of their visit, in the shape of sundry sixpences and shillings, in the hands of the wondering brats, who had never gazed on such El Dorados before.

Then, with a hearty shaking of hands all round, they remounted their horses, and taking a narrow track through the wood, passed onward towards the Towers.

The foliage deepened around them as

they went. The long boughs drooped and swept at times so low that Arthur had to hold them aside for his companion to pass. At such times he gazed into her sweet face, flushed with the exercise of the day and with the indefinable happiness within her heart; and, gazing thus, an irresistible yearning came upon him.

In the midst of the thickest grove he checked his horse, and laid his hand upon his companion's rein. Then he took her small hand in his.

"Katie, you don't know how much I love you. How much I have loved you for these three months past. I never till to-day dared to speak, because I thought there was no hope for me; but I know you better now. My darling! dare I *hope* that you can love me in return?"

It shaped itself now—that vague, indefinite delight which had been circling round her heart. She knew it was love—mutual, unalterable love. His words thrilled her with a joy more intense than she had thought it possible the world could give, and her answer is not hard to guess.



CHAPTER X.

SIX YEARS.

WE have hitherto had but brief glimpses of the early years of Katie and young Deverell.

The events of their maturer years are of deeper significance, and demand a more detailed narration.

Katie had experienced a rude awakening from that dream of early love which enwrapt her when we saw her last. In spite of the affection with which both the baronet and his wife regarded her, their pride of

birth rose straight up on end at the thought of Arthur's marriage with a game-keeper's daughter.

The proposition met with a firm, emphatic refusal. In spite of the good nature which he almost invariably displayed towards those with whom he was brought into contact, Sir Robert Deverell was a proud man at heart. When he contemplated the proposed *mésalliance* of his nephew, he could not but remember that in all human probability the said nephew would, ere long, be the sole representative of a race whose name was illustrious when the finest oaks in his broad park were little more than saplings. Robert Deverell, companion-in-arms of the Conqueror himself, had been knighted on the field of battle when Saxon Harold lay stricken

with the death-wound in his eye. The knight smiled a quiet smile beneath his visor when the giant Norman's sword touched his cunningly-wrought coat of mail ; for knighthood was of small moment to him, who, albeit of a younger branch of the ancient house, could trace his lineage back to Charlemagne himself. The shouts of victory in his ear, and the good red blood upon his trusty blade were *his* reward. Nevertheless he accepted his new honours meekly, and, by means of a goodly slice of the portioned spoils which followed that great fight of Hastings, he founded a name in England which was coupled with renown in many an after reign, and perpetuated a heritage of wealth and pride and probity down to its present possessor.

It was little likely, therefore, that the

present representative of this ancient race could be brought to entertain for a single moment the thought of such a marriage. Lady Deverell, who had scarcely less blue blood in her veins than her husband, was, if possible, more decided in her opposition than he was ; but almost before they had begun to reflect upon the best means to adopt to put an end to the affair, they received an unexpected ally in the person of Katie herself. Almost in the same hour that Arthur had confessed his love for her she had foreseen the consequences. She felt how closely she was bound by every tie of gratitude to Lady Deverell. To inflict on her kind benefactress a moment's pain she felt would be utter baseness on her part. She told Arthur what her feeling was. She entreated him to leave her,

and never to recur to the topic again. She knew that she was sacrificing the dearest happiness the world could bring in relinquishing him, but she knew also that it was a sacrifice which duty imperatively demanded, and she nerved herself to the task. Poor Katie! It was a brief dream of happiness that sunny day in the Devonshire lanes, the ride home through the woods, the confession of mutual love. She would not have had those words unsaid for a kingdom; but, for all that, when she began to reflect, she had sufficient strength of mind, to bind Arthur to a promise that he would never again return to the subject unless he could first obtain the consent of his uncle and aunt, and this her heart told her was tantamount to putting away hope for ever.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Katie," Arthur said, when this proposition was made. "If you'll consent to my going abroad with you, I'll not recur to the topic again for three months. In the meantime we can only hope that my uncle and aunt will change their minds when they see we are in earnest. If I bothered them now, and there was anything like a split, it is quite certain I could not go with you to Italy, and my education could not commence."

It was weak temporizing, but Katie would have been more than mortal had she refused. All she insisted on was the fulfilment of Arthur's promise that they should be nothing more than friends, so that there should be no deception practised towards Sir Robert and Lady Deverell;

and to this Arthur, who was the soul of honour, conscientiously adhered.

So the Italian trip was undertaken, and the lovers, for such they were in heart, enjoyed all the sweets of constant companionship in that wondrous land of poetry and romance. Before, however, the term of probation imposed by Katie had expired, the true state of things gradually dawned upon the phlegmatic nature of Lady Deverell. She mentioned her suspicions to her husband, and suspicion once aroused it was not difficult to discern the truth. Sir Robert went to the point at once, and questioned Arthur on the subject. Arthur, to whom lying and equivocation were things unknown, confessed the true state of the case, and a scene followed such as the placid baronet had

never been an actor in before. Her ladyship was summoned to add her remonstrances to those of the baronet, but the young man would not yield an inch. In the midst of the commotion Katie, who with a trembling heart recognised the cause of the disturbance, herself appeared on the scene. Pride and affection were waging terrible war with each other in the minds of the old people, but Katie at once calmed the turmoil by declaring that nothing should induce her to oppose their wishes, and by entreating Arthur to leave them and return to England. Katie was so firm in her resolve, although her heart was well-nigh breaking, that there was nothing left for Arthur but to yield, and so their days of happiness came suddenly to an end.

But the sunlight died out of Katie's life, and the old couple saw it. Rumours came to them also of the fearfully reckless life Arthur was leading at home. Sir Robert, though not stingy, was a careful man. He had always lived well within his income. The notion of debt or reckless living—and it had been made known to him that his nephew was plunging habitually into both—was in the last degree distasteful to him. He summoned his wife to a consultation and laid the circumstances before her. Their pretty flower, who had been a source to them of such constant happiness, was fading visibly—their nephew in whom all their hopes of the future of the family were centred, was going to the dogs as fast as he could go. A word from them would in all probability set all these things

right, and after another brief but sharp struggle with the old demon Pride, they sent for Arthur and made known their resolve.

It was to this effect. They could never, they said, be brought to give an unqualified consent to the match, but if at the end of two years the young couple remained in the same mind they would no longer oppose their union.

The lovers did remain in the same mind, and at the end of the time specified they were married.

Six years had passed since that time, years of unalloyed happiness to Arthur and his bride, but still fraught with many sad changes. The worthy baronet and his wife had both passed away, dying within three months of each other ; whether their

end was hastened by a feeling of annoyance that they had not been able to prevent the marriage, or by the loss of Katie, is not known, but they were never quite the same after. Arthur reigned in the home of his ancestors, dispensing a princely hospitality which rivalled the most open-handed of his forefathers of old. A new life had opened to him when he first visited Italy in company with her whom he had loved so long and so well; his mind rapidly expanded to the influence of the clime and its associations. He acquired a love of the beautiful in art, which led him to pursue it with the same avidity he had formerly displayed in pursuit of sport. His taste became renowned — perfected possibly by the clear, discerning mind which was ever by his side. In pictures,

sculpture, and china, he was as great an authority as he still was in horses, dogs, and wine. Among virtuosi he was no longer silent as of yore. He could hold his own with the best ; and he pursued his varied tastes with an ardour and an indifference to cost, which was alarming even with the knowledge of the splendid rent - roll pertaining to the estates of Norton.



CHAPTER XI.

MIDNIGHT COLLOQUIES.




THE billiard - room at Norton Towers was unique. I say nothing of the matchless "Burroughes and Watts" which occupied the centre of the room, with its cloth like rich satin, and cushions from which the balls flew off with a motion as swift and noiseless as a swallow on the wing. It was the surroundings which at once caught the eye and made one wish to linger there, and spend a quiet hour or two in a closer in-

spection of the rare objects scattered on every side.

No straight, stiff leather seats disfigured the sides of the room. Those who watched the game, while inhaling the choicest brands of Havannah or the fragrant leaves of the East, lounged upon couches, elaborately carved in oak, and cushioned with maroon velvet, which stood out in tasteful contrast to the olive green wall, picked out with an arabesque of black and gold. Here and there, at a safe distance from the cues of the players, and backed by canopies of the same maroon velvet, were exquisite specimens of the sculptor's art. A Venus from the hand of Canova, a Nymph by Gibson, or a laughing Bacchante from the facile chisel of Neucini. Vases of Sat-

suma and Cloissonée enamel, with their exquisite tracery, and harmonious tints filled the interspaces between the furniture and the statues. Japanese bronzes, bedight with scaly monsters—marvels of intricate workmanship—decorated the mantelpiece and oak window ledges.

At the end of the room farthest from the table, two pillars, of polished serpentine from the Lizard coast, flanked a recess, wherein stood a cabinet stored with some choice specimens of pottery; ranging from the quaint, unsightly, Chinese ware to the voluptuous grace of the products of Dresden and Sèvres. Grouped tastefully in the other recesses were collections of strange weapons from the Indian seas. Bows, kreeses, yataghans; spears with jagged, murderous points, and



tomahawks from the region of the implacable Sioux and warlike Comanche. Relics of the chase too, were in their appointed places overhead. Heads of stags from the Highlands, of boars from the forests of Germany; and dominant over all a black, shaggy, demoniacal head of a bison from the prairies of the Saskatchewan.

Last, though, in the eyes of many frequenters of the room, not least, around the mantelpiece was arranged a wondrous collection of implements for the enjoyment of the fragrant weed. Calumets of ruddy clay from the wigwam of the red Indian, nargilehs from the Mediterranean, hookahs, jewelled and silver mounted, from the luxurious East, and meerschaums with their creamy whiteness tinted to a

Vandyke brown to suit the utilitarian views of the modern smoker.

A large group by Titian, so rich in tone that it formed a key note to the harmonious arrangement of the room, hung on the wall opposite the serpentine pillars. Two or three specimens of Greuze—ill-drawn, but ravishingly sweet and soft—peeped out from the recesses on either side the pillars. Above the mantelpiece were scattered some pictorial gems by Meissonier, which flanked a grand Velasquez-looking Spanish noble, by that modern magician of the pencil, John Philip.

Whatever credit accrued from the collection of these varied objects, was due to Sir Arthur himself, who now stood, cue in hand, talking to his steward, and confidential adviser, Mr. Percival Keith.

Arthur was much changed since that happy morning when he rode down the Devonshire lane with Katie. The freshness of youth had passed. Contact with the world and its crooked ways had exercised the same hardening influence upon him that it does upon most of us. Possibly, also, the responsibilities of his altered position, now that he had succeeded to the baronetcy, may have had an influence.

There was a suspicion of coldness in his manner, possibly a more lofty bearing in his intercourse with others, and at times a reticence which comes to many in middle-life—an intermediate calm between the garrulousness of childhood and old age. The generous, truthful, straightforward nature, however, was the same, but its outer

casing was somewhat hardened by time and contact with the world.

"You must go, Keith?" he said.

"Yes. It's close upon eleven o'clock, and I've a long drive before me."

"You'd much better have stayed the night as I advised. However, a wilful man must have his way. Take another cigar to smoke on the road."

"Thanks."

"You've quite done with me for the present? No more troublesome deeds to sign nor anything of that sort?"

"No, Sir Arthur; I am not likely to trouble you again for some time."

"That's a comfort. If there is one thing I hate more than another it is your long legal documents. Your stroke, I think, Sir John."

The person thus addressed was Admiral Sir John Bolt, of whom the reader has heard in the earlier portions of this story. He was a man of some sixty-five years ; the greater part of which had been spent in arduous service which added some years to his appearance. Few among those who have gained honoured names in the ardent search for a lost compatriot, or in the pursuit of science among the eternal frosts of the north, had achieved greater fame than Sir John. Twice had he been frozen up in the long, dead, winter nights of those silent regions round the yet unconquered Pole ; where winter—mightiest of engineers, bridges, continents together with leagues of unsullied ice, and chains the ocean currents with an iron grasp.

Sir John was resting from his labours

now. He and Sir Arthur's father had been fast friends, and he had a warm affection for his old friend's son, to whom he was now paying a long visit.

The third person in the room, Mr. Percival Keith, is unknown to the reader. He was a keen business man, somewhat plebeian in aspect, of short stature, and with a face wherein it was utterly impossible to detect the faintest indication of what lay beneath the surface. Keith was a sort of hereditary appendage of the property, and had for years known more about its numerous details than the owners themselves.

The game was a hundred up. Sir Arthur's score stood at ninety-seven. The Admiral was some twenty behind. Keith, with the indifference of a man who does not

play, had chosen this inopportune moment to say good-night.

Deverell shook hands with him. The Admiral was regarding the marking-board attentively.

"The game's up," he said. "You only want three to win."

"Good-night, Keith," said Deverell, oblivious to the remark of his old friend. "Take care of yourself, and a pleasant drive to you."

"Thanks, Sir Arthur. Good-night," Keith said, as he went towards the door, passing Sir John on his way. "Good-night, Sir John," he added.

The sturdy Admiral was still busily inspecting the intricacies of the marking-board, and took no heed.

Keith looked at him for a moment in

some surprise, then gave a half-smile, nodded to Sir Arthur, passed the doorway and was gone.

“Your stroke, Sir John,” said the baronet.

“It’s no use, I can’t score I know ; and you only want three to win,” repeated the admiral. He took especial pains with the stroke nevertheless. Failure had all his life been an unknown word in his vocabulary. “The palsied arm, however, will come with age, and a sudden and ill-timed twitch sent the old sailor’s ball flying off the table, with his adversary’s ball in a pocket.”

“Hard luck ! You’ve given me the game after all,” said the baronet, pocketing his ball off the red.

“Hang me if I ever touch a cue again,”

said the admiral, with visible chagrin.

"We old fellows never know when to stop. We think we can do things at seventy which would have puzzled us at thirty-five."

"You should take odds."

"Never took odds in my life, and I don't mean to begin now."

"Have a cigar then, and take the easy chair; we won't go to bed yet. There, I think that will suit you."

Sir Arthur wheeled a capacious chair round to the fire, and selected a cigar from his case. Sir John settled himself in the chair and took the cigar, which he held critically to his nose.

"Not bad I confess—ruinous price as usual, I suppose—puffing away gold if the truth were known."

"That's a secondary consideration if

they please my friends," was the quiet reply.

"It always is with you. What do you get from your friends in exchange?"

"The pleasure of their society—yours for example."

"Ugh! Well, I hope you won't live to repent it."

"I hope not; I've no reason to think so."

The baronet took up a cue and began knocking the balls about as he talked. Sir John lighted his cigar and sat back in his easy chair with an evident enjoyment of the exquisite aroma which was exhaled from the high-priced cabana.

"By the way, I've bought Nugent's stud," the baronet continued, without pausing in his strokes.

The admiral turned quickly in his chair and took the cigar from his lips.

"What, the whole lot?" he exclaimed.

"Every single item. Horses, yearlings, foals, brood mares, paddocks and all, and taken over the stud grooms. By Jove!" he exclaimed, as his ball flew off the red at a difficult angle and went straight into a pocket, "I've done it at last: I've tried that stroke all my life and never succeeded before."

The admiral was oblivious to the balls. "Upon my soul, Arthur," he said in a grave tone, "your extravagance is enough to make a poor man's hair stand on end. Was Nugent hard up?"

"At his last gasp, I believe. Between ourselves there were certain racing debts not paid up, and matters would have looked

ugly if he hadn't realized quickly. I didn't particularly care about the lot, but I like Nugent, and I knew it was doing him a good turn."

"A man that stepped into a fortune fit for a duke," said the admiral, musingly; "He ought to be sent to a lunatic asylum. You'll be in the same scrape yourself, Arthur, if you don't look sharp;" he added, after a pause.

"Not I," rejoined Sir Arthur, laughing; "Keith looks too closely after my concerns."

"A *great deal* too closely," rejoined the admiral significantly.

"How do you mean?" inquired Sir Arthur, leaning over his cue and preparing for another stroke.

"How do I mean?" repeated the old

man ; " I mean that you put a deuced deal too much faith in Keith."

Sir Arthur paused on his stroke in utter amazement, and looked up.

" Too much faith in Keith ?" he exclaimed ; " Why, I'd as soon mistrust myself as Keith."

The old man went on in a determined voice. " All very fine, sir, I've known you ever since you were a boy, and I consider myself privileged to speak ; I tell you you've too much confidence in Keith. Do you ever look into an account ?"

The baronet put down his cue, and coming round to the fire, stood, with his back against the mantelpiece.

" Never," he replied, in a tone which implied a perfect contentment with the omission.

"Nor read a paper?"

"Never. I signed two yesterday without even looking at their contents."

The admiral brought his clenched fist down on the arm of his chair with a thump.

"Then hang me, Arthur, if you don't deserve to be swindled," he said, angrily.

"Look here, Sir John," replied the other, quietly, but with a touch of irony in his voice. "With me there are no degrees of confidence: it must be unlimited. If I suspected a man I wouldn't keep him in my employ a day. Suspicion demoralizes."

"And over-confidence breeds deceit."

"Not if people are honest at heart."

"How many are? Not one in a thousand."

"That's your worldly view of things—the cold calculating theory of age."

"Born of the mistaken enthusiasm of youth," said the admiral, firing the last shot.

Sir Arthur was unconvinced, though he retired gracefully, out of deference to his father's old friend, who was waxing warm.

"Well, have it so if you like," he said: "Let me give you some seltzer and brandy."

He brought some of the sparkling mixture from a side table, and placed it beside the old knight. The latter sat looking musingly into the fire, with an occasional quick puff of smoke coming from his lips, compact and round as the smoke from one of his own guns.

"I only hope your wife will keep you

straight," he said at length ; "you turned up trumps there, at any rate."

Sir Arthur could not resist the return shot.

"So much for the mistaken enthusiasm of youth, Sir John," he said, slyly.

The admiral gave a jerk, as if struck amidships.

"Umph! you had me there, I confess, but I forgive you for the sake of your wife. She is certainly next door to an angel. You must absolutely worship her."

"Yes, we get on very well together," was the impassive rejoinder.

"Good God!" exclaimed the knight, "is that all you have to say about her?"

"What more should I say?" asked Sir Arthur, quietly lighting a cigar.

His friend stared at him for a full half minute, in amazement.

“What do you think of your new mare?”
he at length asked.

“What has that got to do with it?”

“I ask you what you think of her.”

“Think—I think her perfect—a shoulder like a fortress—legs a pattern of strength and symmetry—paces like a fawn, and an eye like Juno——”

“Exactly,” broke in the knight. “You go into raptures about your mare, but you haven’t ten words to say about your wife, who is as near perfection as it’s possible for a woman to be. Hang me if I don’t believe you young men think more about your horses than you do about your wives.”

The baronet gave a dry laugh, and sent the smoke out from between his lips in a long thin stream.

“Confound it, Sir John,” he said, “you

wouldn't have me run over my wife's points, as I do that of a hunter, would you? No, no, I don't wear my heart upon my sleeve, if you mean that, but my wife understands me well enough."

"Upon my soul I hope she does," was the rejoinder, "for much as I hate women in general—thank heaven, we escaped them in the Arctic regions—I must say your wife has fairly won my heart. A more beautiful creature I never knew, nor a sweeter disposition. I was a fool for objecting to the match," he added, "so was your uncle, but he never would if he could have seen her as she is now—as it was, I believe it half killed him."

"Ah!" said Sir Arthur, settling himself in an easy chair, opposite Sir John. "It was a sad blow to the old man, my marry-

ing a keeper's daughter—the only taint in the blood of the Deverells, he used to call it. Hush, here she is!"

Katie entered the room as he spoke. The intervening years had made less change in her than in her husband. With the exception of a slight additional roundness of form and a more matronly expression, she was almost the same as on the day when Arthur had first encountered her at Rutland Gate. There was the same grace in her movements, the same fascination of voice and manner which had belonged to her in former days. Men still bowed down and worshipped her as of old, and even her own sex were scarcely less attracted by the winning charm of her manner.

"What, up at this hour, Katie?" said

her husband. "I thought you were in bed ages ago."

"No, I have been writing. My only chance of getting through my correspondence is when my visitors are in bed. I am still sadly in arrear. But I came to send you two to bed," she added. "It is too bad of you to keep Sir John up so late, Arty. He's dreadfully naughty about sitting up, Sir John. What a smoky atmosphere! Do let me give you some air."

Arthur's love for his wife had, if anything, increased with years. A feeling akin to devotion was in his mind as his eyes followed her lovingly to the window towards which she now moved. She drew aside the curtain and threw open the window which opened lattice-wise. A full

flood of moonlight poured into the room and bathed her in a silver glory.

"You'll catch a confounded cold if you don't mind," growled the admiral.

"No fear of that," she rejoined, "thanks to my bringing up."

She leaned out of the window. "What a lovely night!" she said musingly, as she gazed on the canopy above crowded with glittering stars.

"Good night, Arthur," said the admiral rising. "I don't want to catch lumbago."

Lady Deverell laughed a little silver laugh, like a stream which encounters a pebble and ripples over it.

"Oh, do come and look at the moon, Sir John," she cried.

"No, thank you, my lady. The moon

seems to have got on remarkably well without me so far. The moon is still vigorous; I'm not. The moon doesn't get lumbago; I do. The moon sleeps all day; I don't—therefore I like to sleep at night. I leave the moon to you: she can't be in better hands. Good night."

The admiral took his candle and retired.

"Dear old man," said Sir Arthur musing, "he's had enough of moonlight in the Polar seas to last a lifetime. You know, Kate, he was one of the great Arctic explorers — he and my father. What, in a reverie!" he continued, seeing that his wife took no heed.

He rose, and advancing quietly to the window, passed his arm round her waist.

They were silent for a few moments.

"Isn't the light on the lake lovely?" she said.

"Yes," he replied; "but moonlight is a sad light at the best—like a happy smile on the face of Death."

"Arthur, what is the matter with you?"

She detected something in his face in a moment, and gazed at him earnestly.

"I don't know," he replied. "Somehow as I looked at that light a gloomy foreboding of evil came over me.

He returned to his seat by the fire. She stood looking at him anxiously.

"Katie, come here," he said.

She was at his side in a moment, and rested her hands on his shoulder.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"Sit there," he said, pointing to a footstool at his feet.

She placed herself at once where he indicated, with her hands resting on his knees.

"Well?" she said, looking up inquiringly.

He paused a moment, and then said,

"Katie, do you think I love you?"

Her eyes opened in mute surprise.

"How can you ask me, Arthur? What should I be if I did not feel sure of your love?"

"And yet they say I don't appreciate you."

"Who says so?" she inquired with increasing surprise.

"Well, Sir John for one."

"That is because you are too proud to let out your heart before people."

"You think me proud?"

"Don't I know you are? I don't love you less for that. It is the heritage of the Deverells; you are proud in spite of yourself. I like to think it, for it tells me how much you must have loved ever to think of making me your wife."

Sir Arthur passed his hand lovingly down the rich tress of hair which escaped from its coil and fell in graceful waves on to her shoulder.

"A less proud man might not have done so," he said. "True pride abhors meanness. Having won your love, pride forbade my doing a dishonourable act. The blood of the old Crusader—the first Sir Arthur — which flows in my veins, makes me feel that I would rather die than disgrace the old stock. Do you know the story of that first Sir Arthur, darling?"

“No.”

“He was a man of indomitable courage and iron will, the equal of Cœur de Lion himself. He was reported to have been killed in the East, but he suddenly reappeared in England, and found his wife, who had believed him dead, betrothed to a rich man of ignoble birth. It is said she was reduced to poverty, and had done it to save her child. Be that as it may, the old Crusader struck her dead at his feet, left the country, and died fighting against the Saracens. To the last hour he was known as Deverell of the Broken Heart.”

Lady Deverell had withdrawn slightly from her recumbent posture, and sat with her eyes fixed on the ground.

“It was a cruel deed,” she said; “I

should not like you to inherit such a nature, Arthur."

"No darling," he replied in a lighter tone. "Besides, modern civilization has tamed down our natural ferocity somewhat. Emotion is not respectable in these days, but even loving you as I do, darling, I still feel if you were guilty of a single act which would bring a blush of shame to the brow, I could never look upon your face again."

Lady Deverell looked up in sudden surprise. "Oh, Arty, do not imagine such a thing," she said, in a tone half of indignation, half of entreaty.

"I do not," he replied quickly; "I know it is impossible. Have I not proved your worth a thousand times? How happy I am in your love!"

"And yet you look sad. What is the meaning of this gloom?"

"I cannot tell—it is unaccountable."

"Come, let me weave what you used to call the magic circle about you," she said; half rising and throwing her arms about her husband's neck. He took her face between his hands, looking straight into her eyes.

"You are indeed an enchantress," he said fondly; "how beautiful you are, my darling. It is little wonder that Arthur Deverell's wife is renowned through all the country side for goodness and beauty. There is no one like you in all the world, Katie."

She clung to him still more closely, but she said archly, "Flatterer! so, after all, it was only pride made you marry me."

"I'm half inclined to retort and say 'yes,' if you will have it so. In truth though," he added, "Love went hand in hand with Pride in our case. I would not have lost you for a realm."

He stooped and pressed a long loving kiss on her forehead.

"Oh, Arty!" she sighed in excess of joy, "was ever wife so happy as I?"

The moonlight streamed in upon them as they sat, rapt in the intense fervour of perfect unchanging love; and to all outward seeming care was as far distant as the stars which strewed, as with flowers, the pathway of the midnight Queen.



CHAPTER XII.

ON THE TERRACE.

THE Italian proverb *Vedi Napoli e poi muori* might well be applied, with a simple change of name, to the view from the terrace at Norton. The old mansion, with its two flanking towers—somewhat apart from the main body of the building, which was of later date, stood on an elevated ridge overlooking a wealth of park and wood and meadow-land beyond. Far beyond, indeed, for the park stretched away for a mile or more

from the mansion, and was bounded by a belt of oak-forest, rich in the tints of autumn, which fell in wavelike undulations into a deep rocky valley, in whose lowest depths the stream—which we remember in connection with the early days of our hero—foamed and tumbled amid a labyrinth of rock and tangled undergrowth, and sent its “tender curving lines of creamy foam,” still farther down to the estuary of the English Channel, which bounded the view to the south.

Beneath the ancestral oaks—the youngest of which had braved the storms of many centuries—innumerable deer browse amid the bracken which garnishes with gold the boles of mighty trees. It is morning, and the air is so calm, that the autumn mists still hang about the

valleys, softening the distant outlines, and marking the course of the stream where it lies hidden by the woods. The sky —intensely blue, in contrast to the red sandstone soil, so marked a feature of beautiful Devon — is literally without a cloud. So still is the air, that clouds of gnats disport themselves above the shining meads, where the deer have left their tracks in the grass from which the dew has been brushed by their passing feet; and the stream a mile and a half away sends up a low, continuous murmur through the sunny air.

He who looked on such a scene and could call it his own, might be pardoned for indulging in the pride of possession, and must needs look back with gratitude to those brave hearts of old,

whose gallant deeds earned for him so fair an abiding place.

The cold discomfort of newness was a thing unknown at Norton Towers. All was well kept, but the mellowing hand of Time had toned down everything, from the quaint oak chairs in the hall to the old grey steps, covered with ivy, which led from the terrace to the lower garden walks. This terrace ran the whole length of the mansion on the south side, and, though the season was growing late, its stone balustrades and vases were still wreathed with a wealth of roses which shed a delicious fragrance far around.

Two mornings after the close of my last chapter, a goodly company was seated on this terrace, enjoying the exquisite view and the almost summer sunshine; while

they indulged in a conversation so brimming over with wit, that it seemed born of the bright air itself.

In the centre of this group, seated on an ivy-covered bench of curiously carved stone, was Lady Deverell—always the leading attraction, from her unrivalled beauty and the winning grace of her manner, in whatever company she might be placed. Seated near her hostess was our old acquaintance of the hunting-field, Miss Vereker, now one of the richest heiresses in England, whose wealth was a sort of deadly nightshade to her, poisoning, by the deceit it exposed, the deep under-current of generosity in a really noble nature; making her days wretched with perpetual tales of woe, her nights sleepless with the thought that possibly she had misjudged some whining hypocrite,

who, like a thousand other harpies, would have set upon her, and devoured up all her substance in a month if they had the chance.

She could hardly be called handsome, but a certain quiet earnestness of expression in her face made many think her so. The wealth she had inherited brought her flattery in sickening profusion, and flattery she hated. Of men she was suspicious. She knew that they loved gold, and she doubted their disinterestedness. Gladly would she have set aside her wealth ; but she was strictly conscientious, and she could not reconcile to her conscience the thought of putting aside the responsibilities her fortune entailed.

The rest of the group on the terrace was made up by four others. Blanche Somers,

a pretty, light-hearted girl of eighteen ; our old friend, Val Poingdestre, unaltered, save for the presence of a few grey hairs ; Clement Boyd, R.A., the most popular portrait painter of the day, though not yet eight-and-twenty ; and our friend of two nights ago, Sir John Bolt, who, sitting somewhat apart from the rest, was making strenuous efforts to read the newly arrived paper, though not altogether able to avoid listening to the conversation, which, like the outbreak of many waters, flowed on around him.

“So the Earl was left out in the cold,” said Val Poingdestre, interposing his six feet of substantial flesh and blood between Miss Vereker and the distant view, and looking straight at her, though his words were addressed to his hostess.

"Yes," said the latter, "and the poet won the lady and all her lands."

"Very pretty in fiction, but not probable in fact," struck in Mr. Boyd.

"Why not?" asked Lady Deverell, turning quickly.

"Because money, not merit, wins now-a-days," quoth the artist.

"Rank heresy, Mr. Boyd," said Lady Deverell, with an earnestness which brought a flush to her face; "You should be the last person to utter such a libel on the age."

"Why? May I ask."

"If I must be personal, is it money or merit that the world looks for in you?"

"Not much of the first, truly, and very little of the second, I'm afraid."

The lady warmed to the contest. "This

from you," she said, "you, who have but to cover a few feet of canvas, to get a price which would have been an Earl's ransom in days gone by. You, who have all the beauty and fashion of London in your tapestried galleries; you, who bask in the sunshine of royalty itself?"

The artist shrugged his shoulders, and put his hands in his pockets.

"Just because it's my luck to be the fashion—another generation may consider my pictures mere daubs."

Bright-eyed Blanche Somers, who was seated beside Lady Deverell, looked slyly round.

"If they don't forget them altogether," she said.

The artist winced visibly.

"Thank you, Miss Somers," he said,

"that is a more probable fate, since *you* condemn them."

"I condemn them!" echoed the light-hearted girl; "I admire them immensely." Then with another wicked twinkle in her eye, she added, "But then, you see, I'm no judge."

Boyd turned away, biting his lip in evident vexation. Every word that fell from the lips of Blanche Somers moved him more than he chose to confess. Lady Deverell turned to her friend with a reproachful glance.

"Blanche, how can you be so unmerciful?" she said, in an undertone.

Blanche looked as if she thought she had gone too far, and so tried to laugh it off. "I do it for his good," she replied. "He would be awfully conceited if I didn't

snub him now and then ; and I hate a conceited man."

" Then I conclude you don't altogether hate Mr. Boyd."

" Not entirely. He might be driven to do something desperate, you know, and I don't wish to be morally responsible for a suicide, or anything of that sort."

All this was in too low a tone to be heard by the others. Val Poingdestre began to be impatient.

" What about the Earl all this time ?" he asked.

" Oh, the rhyme does not say," answered Lady Deverell.

" It only lets you know that Lady Geraldine married the poet," said Blanche.

Boyd, who had been leaning out over the terrace, suddenly turned,

"Perhaps the Earl drowned himself," he said, in a tone of quiet sarcasm.

"Not likely," responded Val: "disappointed lovers take more to wine than to water."

"Shocking!" exclaimed Blanche. "Is there no romance left—not even among poets and artists?"

Her looks were bent on Boyd, as she concluded the sentence. It devolved on him to reply. At that moment he would not have confessed to a grain of sentiment for a kingdom.

"No, Miss Somers, we have given up the cloak and slouched hat. We ride in the Row now, turned out by Poole, with a smart groom behind us, bless you."

Val broke into a loud laugh. "What a millennium for art," he said, "a ride in a

straight road, under trimmed trees, with a fellow behind in tops and bright buttons. Is that the way to cultivate an eye for the picturesque?"

"No," said the artist, still dogged, "but it's the way to cultivate sitters—that's all we care about."

Blanche's conscience began to grow uneasy. Lady Deverell took up the ball.

"What would poor Correggio have said, toiling home in the burning sun, under his load of copper?"

"Or Cimabue, as he followed his Virgin?" said Miss Vereker.

"Or Morland, as he painted his pigs?" said Blanche,

"Very much in liquor," quoth Val.

"Which, the pigs or the painter?" asked Boyd.

"Both," answered Val. "You're a bad lot."

"What are you all talking about?" cried Sir Arthur, suddenly appearing on the scene.

"Lady Geraldine," replied his wife.

"Oh, then you've heard?" said Sir Arthur.

"Heard what?" was the general exclamation.

"That she's dead lame?" replied the Baronet.

"Who?" inquired Val.

"Why, Lady Geraldine: you said you were all talking about her."

"Bless your innocent heart," said Val, "they're miles away in the clouds of quest. They're talking of Mrs. Barrett Browning's heroine, not your new mare."

"~~I beg your pardon~~ I beg your pardon, I'm sure," answered ~~the Baronet~~. "I must apologize for bring-

ing you back to earth. However, *my* Lady Geraldine has got a twist in her near fore leg. Val, you rode her yesterday, you must be the culprit."

Val put on an injured air, which had something in it irresistibly comic.

"If you will put me on the top of a mare that flies a Devonshire hedge instead of topping it, what can you expect?" he said. "I consider myself lucky to have saved my neck. The mare breasted the last unexpectedly by way of variety, and I went over in advance of my steed, like a middle-aged Mercury in full flight. It was remarkably pretty to look at, but not so pleasant to perform."

"Why, you never said a word about it," struck in Sir Arthur.

"No," replied Val. "I always think

these things better suppressed. I stood on my head on the other side for a moment—very much to the detriment of my hat—and then came down gracefully on my back. The mare came over after me to see what was up. She dropped with her foot in a rut, but I didn't fancy she was hurt—she went right enough afterwards."

"Why, how came you to have all this performance to yourself?" asked Sir Arthur, in surprise.

"Because I like to go straight," answered Val. "It often gets one into difficulties though—don't you think so, Miss Vereker?"

"Possibly," answered that lady, coming away from the distant sea-line, but looking in no way interested in the question, which was evidently intended to recall her from her self-abstraction and indifference.

"I've a proposition to make to you," said Sir Arthur.

"How delightful!" cried Blanche. "I'm sure, by your face, it's something nice. What is it?"

"What do you say to a trip to Denham Chase—the autumn tints will be splendid just now."

"Do you mean to-day, Arthur?" asked Lady Deverell.

"At once, if you all approve."

"I'll answer for everybody," cried Blanche. "I'm sure it will be charming. I was dying for something to do. Every one is so stupid this morning."

"Let us start at once, then," said Sir Arthur. "Those who like to ride can have a mount—those who prefer driving can go in the wagonette."

Boyd, in the general move, had found himself by the side of Blanche, a little apart from the rest.

"Am I never to get anything but poisoned shafts?" he asked in a low tone.

"Do they hurt?" inquired the pretty coquette.

"Dreadfully," Boyd answered.

"I'm so very glad."

"May I ask why?"

"Because I thought Royal Academicians quite invulnerable—far above all mundane attacks."

She turned away to Lady Deverell, and so cut off the chance of a reply. Val had managed to draw Miss Vereker aside.

"Will you ride, Miss Vereker?" he asked.

"No. I prefer the wagonette," she replied.

Another man might have been annoyed by the curtness of the response—Val's face was perfectly serene. With equal serenity he continued :

"If I had ventured to suggest the wagonette, should you have preferred to ride?"

"Possibly."

He was not to be beaten in self-possession.

"Do you answer 'Possibly' to everything?" he asked.

The question would have been an impertinence in any one else. Val had the knack of giving utterance to everything that came uppermost in his mind with such a perfectly calm and well-bred air, that he never offended. The lady was his match in this respect.

"Not when the question is too weak to admit of 'possibility,'" she answered.

Val's face was still unruffled.

"Admitting my weakness where you are concerned," he said, "if I venture to offer myself as an escort, is there a chance of my offer being accepted?"

"Possibly," replied the lady again.

Lady Deverell and the rest were on the move.

"I want you all to come and see my new picture before we start," said Sir Arthur.

"What, the Sir Joshua?" asked Boyd.

"Yes. It's only just arrived. It's a gem, I can assure you."

"It ought to be," growled Sir John, who had not risen from his seat, "that is, if you gave £3000 for it."

“ I’d have given double rather than let it slip,” said the baronet. “ It’s in the library ; so come along all of you, if you want to see something really fine.”



CHAPTER XIII.

EVIL TIDINGS.

SIR John settled himself comfortably in his seat when the last of the party had disappeared within the quaint old porch. The spot was his favourite one for reading the papers, when the weather was at all propitious. He was there so often that he had acquired a feeling of proprietorship in connection with it, and he had felt all the morning that his territory had been ruthlessly invaded.

He sat for some time looking out over the distant landscape—not that the scene had any particular charm for him. The love of the beautiful, if he had ever indulged in it in youth, had long since been expelled from his nature by a hard practical life ; but he was revolving in his mind many things connected with his friend, Sir Arthur, which did not leave him sufficiently at rest to enable him to pursue his favourite occupation—reading the papers.

The sun was increasing in heat. Ice, frozen at a temperature of 40° below zero takes a long time to thaw, and the old admiral had been so thoroughly frozen in the Polar seas that he could stand a good deal of thawing still. The hum of insects and the odour of roses which pervaded the

soft air were irresistible, however ; their soothing influence began to tell on him. He looked languidly at the paper once or twice, and then let it fall on his knees : his eyes closed, his head gradually fell on one side. For one brief instant he dreamed that he was falling from the main-yard of his old ship, and he was broad awake again in a moment. The paper was again raised—his eyes ran down a few lines of the first leading article—the letters became indistinct—then ran together—then disappeared. His head went backwards this time, and reposed comfortably against the back of the terrace seat—the transition state was so brief that dreams were absent, and he slept in peace.

An independent young fly who was pursuing a reckless course along the terrace,

was attracted by the calm face of the sleeper, and 'brought up' on a neighbouring twig of myrtle. Having completed its distant survey very much to its own satisfaction, and satisfied itself as well that the sleeper really slept, it decided on a closer inspection. The nose—somewhat of the Roman character—presented the best point of observation for a survey of the facial scenery; and on the tip of the nose it accordingly alighted. The effect was disastrous. Sir John was a light sleeper. The application of the fly's proboscis to the Admiral's nose caused the latter to start up, and in the confusion of the moment to inflict a severe blow upon the said nose, intended for the unprincipled disturber of his slumbers, who, as the blow fell, darted nimbly on one side, and, with a most re-

prehensible entomological indifference, pursued its reckless way along the terrace.

The forty winks which the Admiral had snatched, however, had freshened him up for his paper in a wondrous manner. He recommenced the leading article, and tracked it to the end without a check. Presently, however, his thoughts reverted to the place he was in and its owner, and again the paper dropped on to his knees. Then his thoughts shaped themselves into words—

“A contrast between uncle and nephew,” he said. “It’s enough to make the old man turn in his grave. To think how many years it took him to clear the estates only to pave the way to this reckless extravagance! Three thousand pounds for a picture—for a shilling’s worth of paint on a square yard of canvas. Why, you might

paint a line-of-battle ship for half the money, and have something to show for it into the bargain. Shocking, shocking !”

His musings were cut short by the approach of a servant round the angle of the terrace—

“ Mr. Bulfinch wishes to speak with you, Sir John,” the man said.

“ To speak with me ? what does he want with me ?”

“ I’m not aware, Sir John,” replied the servant. “ Shall I say you will see him ?”

“ No—that is, yes—if he wishes to see me ; I suppose he has something particular to say.”

“ Yes, Sir John. He asked for Sir Arthur, but finding he was out, said he should be obliged if you would see him.”

“ Let him come here, then. Confound

the man," he continued, as the servant withdrew, "am I never to get a moment's peace to read the papers. I must make short work of him, for I hate the fellow from the bottom of my heart. A conceited vulgar upstart. I wonder Arthur doesn't get rid of him."

Emerging from the porch came Mr. John Bulfinch, junior, a man of some six or eight and thirty. Sir Arthur had long since forgotten the incident of the hunting field, when Bulfinch, junior, upset Katie in the gateway, and had felt the weight of Arthur's cane. Bulfinch, senior, had served the Deverells long and faithfully, and the son was forgiven for the sake of his father.

Mr. John Bulfinch's chief characteristic was obtrusiveness. He was obtrusive in every sense of the word, from the exu-

berant bushiness of his red whiskers, to the exasperating polish of his patent leather boots. He was nevertheless what people called a successful man — the success of sheer impudence, not of talent. His father had, from the possession of business-like habits and incessant industry, risen from a comparatively humble position to become a partner in a respectable firm of solicitors at Sandport, of whom he at last remained the sole surviving partner, and the provincial attorney of the Deverells. The son had not inherited the father's good qualities. He had been wild in youth, and, in later life, greedy in the acquisition of wealth, that it might be lavished on his own pleasures; and was, moreover, not over scrupulous as to the mode in which it was attained. He

had contrived, however, to keep himself sufficiently respectable, to retain the practice after his father's death ; supplying a deficiency of brains by a plethora of words, which, in the mouth of a lawyer, too often deludes the weak-minded, who are easily overwhelmed by a shower of technicalities. He was the first to speak, of course. He always was. If he had been in the presence of the Queen herself, he would have at once addressed her Majesty with his usual obtrusive unctuousness ; though, probably, her Majesty would not have been disposed to consider him, as the shallow souls of his native town did, " such a nice free-spoken gentleman."

" Good morning, Sir John," he said, advancing and taking off his hat with a flourish. He always took off his hat on

every possible occasion. He had heard that George the Fourth took off his hat with a grace that nobody could surpass. John Bulfinch at once determined that there was no reason why, in this respect, he should not be at least the equal of the deceased monarch ; and it would be rash to say how many times he had practised before the glass, so immensely to his own satisfaction, that he lost no opportunity of performing the same feat in the presence of spectators ; while the expression which accompanied the act said, as clearly as words, "George the Fourth couldn't do it better."

"Good morning, Sir John. A lovely morning. I hope I find you well."

"Thank you, sir," responded the worthy admiral, whose visage grew stern at the

first words of the questioner ; “with me that is a superfluous inquiry. I’m always well.”

“ Ah ! an enviable condition, Sir John—an enviable condition—but still, who could be ill on such a lovely morning ? A second summer, Sir John—quite an Indian summer, blue sky, yellow leaves, birds’ songs. It enlivens the heart, elevates the soul—lifts one up in fact. Alone, Sir John ? ”

“ I was until you arrived, Mr. Bulfinch.”

“ Ah ! solitude on such a morning is, to say the least, charming.”

“ I was just thinking so.”

“ Ah, indeed ! yes. Musing, no doubt ? ”

“ No ; reading the papers.”

“ Ah yes, papers. Yes, what should we be without our papers ? Breakfast wouldn’t be breakfast without the *Times*.

nor tea tea without the *Globe*. The paper in one hand, a cup of hot tea in the other, with plenty of sugar and cream ; and the buttered toast literally melting in one's mouth, what pleasure in life can equal it ? Sir Arthur out ?”

“ Yes—they're all out.”

There was a pause of a few seconds, then the lawyer continued—

“ Ah, well ! I've a great respect for Sir Arthur—an immense respect ; but I'm not altogether sorry to find you alone, Sir John. You are, I believe, a very old friend, Sir John ?”

Another form in which Mr. Bulfinch's obtrusiveness was especially offensive was in the perpetual repetition of the particular appellation of the person he addressed ; the constant recurrence of the “ Sir John,”

tickled his own vanity, for it pleasantly reminded him of the fact that he was conversing on easy terms with an admiral and a K.C.B.

The admiral forgot his dislike to the man for a moment, in the remembrances awakened by the question.

“His oldest friend,” he said; “known him ever since he was a boy. Served with his father up to the time of his death. Look upon Arthur almost as my own son.”

Mr. Bulfinch assumed a sentimental expression, suitable to the occasion. “It’s really fortunate then that I find you at home, Sir John—very fortunate. It will, in fact, make matters run more smoothly.”

“Make what matters run more smoothly?” asked the Admiral, in surprise.

“Excuse my answering a moment, Sir John. I am admiring this exquisite view. What is it Shakespeare says? ‘This castle hath a—hath a—’ dear me, how does it run? ‘The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our senses.’”

“Excuse *me*, Mr. Bulfinch. If you have anything to say, had you not better say it before we are interrupted. Shakespeare can no doubt wait.”

“Quite right, Sir John—perfectly right—but still on such a lovely morning it seems hard to revert to a topic which may give possible pain—Sir Arthur, for instance. Like you remember him ever since he was a boy. My father, as perhaps you are aware, transacted all his uncle’s legal matters—while I have transacted all Sir Arthur’s. Put up with many a snub too.

A proud race the Deverells — infernal proud."

There was an expression in Mr. Bulfinch's eye as he uttered the last words, which was not pleasant to behold. The remembrance of the riding whip came back to him with peculiar vividness. The look, however, was not observed by Sir John, who replied simply, in order to keep his objectionable visitor to the point—

"You were referring to Sir Arthur himself."

"Well, yes," the lawyer continued, — "riding no doubt at this moment without a thought of care. Enjoying the birds and the sunshine — just what he is fit for — just what I like when I get the chance — but unfortunately no head for business."

"Mr. Bulfinch," the admiral replied rather testily, "I gather from your remarks that you have something unpleasant to say. Oblige me by saying it. Is Sir Arthur in any difficulty?"

Mr. Bulfinch sat back in his chair, and contemplated the blue sky. "No, my dear sir," he said, "nothing of much moment to a philosophic mind, such as yours or mine. The shock will be great at first, no doubt. It's not pleasant, even in such lovely weather, to be told an unpleasant truth, but the fact of the matter is, Percival Keith has—bolted."

The admiral spun round, as if he had been shot. "Percival Keith bolted!" he echoed.

"Bolted yesterday morning—clean gone—evaporated."

The admiral resumed his former position.

"On second thoughts I consider it rather a good riddance of bad rubbish," he said.

"A philosophic way of looking at it, Sir John, worthy of yourself, and quite in harmony with the weather. I should regard it in that light myself, only Keith's evaporation involves consequences of some importance to Sir Arthur."

"What consequences, Mr. Bulfinch?"

"Well—shall we say the break up of this most charming establishment, the sale of his estates—the ?——"

"Good God, sir! what do you mean?" interrupted Sir John.

The lawyer assumed a more serious expression.

"If I must descend to plain matter-of-

fact," he said, "I mean that Sir Arthur has been leading a reckless course for years—that the estates are hopelessly encumbered—that some heavy sums are now due, and that Keith has bolted with all the available cash."

As Mr. Bulfinch delivered himself of these words, he sat back, with the air of a man who had undertaken a great duty, and had acquitted himself with satisfaction to himself, and to the comfort of all concerned.

Poor Sir John was for a moment speechless. He was too much aghast to notice the disgusting self-satisfaction of the man who had delivered himself of this astounding intelligence. It seemed as if the news were too much for him to comprehend all at once.

"Is this possible?" he at length gasped. "Why, he had a clear twenty thousand a year."

"Quite so, Sir John—quite so; but a hundred thousand a year would not stand the strain Sir Arthur has put upon the estate. He was hit very hard on the Derby last year, and again at Ascot this year. No income could stand it."

"I never dreamed of this. I knew he was reckless, but I never imagined he was on the brink of ruin."

"Excuse me, Sir John; not on the brink, at the bottom of the pit, sir—absolutely and entirely at the bottom."

Sir John turned on him so suddenly that Mr. Bulfinch started back, and nearly upset the garden chair upon which he was seated.

“Upon my soul, sir, I should like to pitch you after him! What do you mean by spouting Shakespeare, and talking all your absurd balderdash about the weather, in the face of such a collapse as this? Who has advised him, I should like to know?”

“Gently, Sir John, gently; you know I had nothing to do with advising him. Keith is the culprit, the sole and entire culprit.”

“All very fine, sir! You told me just now that you had been his legal adviser.”

“Excuse me again—not legal adviser. My words were that I had transacted all legal matters. Observe the distinction.”

“And pray may I ask the nature of those legal matters?”

"You may most assuredly. Leases, loans, mortgages——"

"Mortgages!" broke in Sir John in horror.

"Most certainly—mortgages upon mortgages, and at heavy interest."

"And what is to be the result, in heaven's name?" the admiral gasped.

"Foreclosure, ruin, penury, possible arrest."

The admiral sprang to his feet with an oath.

"Never!" he cried. "Never! If I spend the last shilling I have in the world; so help me heaven!"

Mr. Bulfinch continued to regard the blue sky attentively.

"Ah! Sir John, I honour the feeling you express—I appreciate your warmth

of heart—but the amount is fearful! The estates might have cleared him—but the money! The fifteen thousand, for example, lodged in the bank to pay Nugent, carried clean off in hard cash—in crisp bank notes, Sir John, negotiated doubtless by this time. Another cheque for three thousand for a single picture, presented only this morning, and, of course, dishonoured. Five hundred for a pair of useless Cloissonée vases, a thousand for the marble Venus: where is all this to come from? The fact is, Sir John, his weak point is that he never understood the value of money. His notion was that an income like his would stretch indefinitely, like india-rubber; but there is a point at which even india-rubber will snap. That point Sir Arthur has reached."

Mr. Bulfinch flourished his pocket-handkerchief complacently, and then produced a trumpet note with his nose, as a finale to the profound sentiment of which he had delivered himself.

Sir John was wiping his forehead, down which the perspiration was streaming, from the excess of his emotion. Presently he collected himself sufficiently to speak calmly.

"Mr. Bulfinch, will you tell me one thing? Were you aware of all this?"

"Of all what, Sir John?"

"Of these mortgages, loans, and dishonoured cheques?"

"Of the mortgages and loans certainly—the papers were all drawn by me."

"And you offered no remonstrance?"

"I, Sir John? I? when I was assured by Keith that Sir Arthur would never

read a single document. No, no; I knew my place better. A proud lot the Deverells—infernal proud.”

The man of large words sat back in his chair with the full consciousness of having adhered strictly to his duty.

“And you considered it right,” pursued Sir John, “to go on drawing deeds which meant simple ruin, without insisting on an explanation?”

An ominous cloud was gathering on the admiral’s brow. Mr. Bulfinch was too much occupied with his observation of the natural region of clouds to notice it.

“I did—I may have been mistaken—but from the bottom of my heart I can say I did. It is useless agitating yourself further, my dear sir; we must all bow to the decrees of Providence.”

The cloud was still deepening on the admiral's brow.

"You call *this* a decree of Providence?" he said sternly.

"I do—most assuredly."

Sir John rose to his feet once more.

"It may be a decree of Providence," he said, "that a man who won't look into his own affairs comes to grief; but I tell you, sir, it is no less a decree of Providence that I should call all those who have had a hand in *this* affair a set of infernal swindlers, sir."

The admiral grasped his silver-headed cane in a manner that intimated to the lawyer the advisability of placing a few yards between them. Mr. Bulfinch moved suddenly to the other side of the terrace.

"Really, Sir John, this language some-

what exceeds the limits of vituperation allowed by law."

"A very little more, sir, would make me exceed the limits of *castigation* allowed by law, but the time is too precious. My poor boy—my poor dear boy! Thank God I was here to break the fearful news to him! Do you know, sir, where this villain is gone?" he added. "Has nothing been done to arrest him?"

Mr. Bulfinch was not inclined to beard the old sea-lion in his den—he answered meekly,

"You cannot suppose that a single thing has been left undone. It is, however, useless I fear. He's had too many hours start, and has doubtless put leagues of blue sea between himself and the officers of justice long before this."

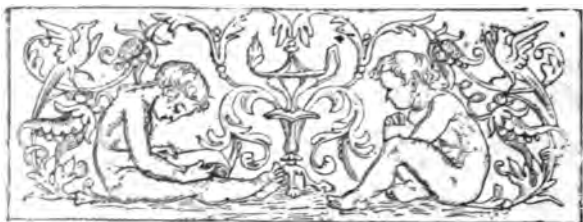
"And what do you propose doing, pray?"

"I came here this morning to arrange—I was fortunate in finding you. Mr. Poulson, the banker, will be here presently. You will, of course, inform Sir Arthur as soon as he returns."

"For God's sake, let us decide on something," returned the admiral. "It will be the death of him. Mercy on us! to think such villainy should be allowed to exist. Come to my room and let us talk the matter over as quietly as we can!"

He turned slowly away, followed by the man of evil tidings. There was something in the admiral's look and gait which conveyed the idea of ten years being added to his age. He seemed quite broken down, and if Mr. Bulfinch had not been

still so intent upon the sky, he might have seen a tear trickle down the weather-beaten cheek which had serenely borne the brunt of nearly fifty years of hard service in his country's cause.



CHAPTER XIV.

TWO PAIRS OF LOVERS.

THE terrace was left to its roses for the rest of the morning. Luncheon had been conveyed to Denham Chase, and the party were not expected to return until towards evening.

The shadows were just beginning to lengthen in the angles of the old mansion, when Blanche Somers, in her riding habit, emerged from the porch, followed by Mr. Boyd.

The young lady looked flushed, and

chose to affect an indignation which might be taken for what it was worth. She turned sharply on her admirer.

"This comes of trusting to your guidance, Mr. Boyd."

"I thought you knew the way—I trusted to you," he replied.

"Nonsense. We shall get nicely laughed at. I suppose they have all come back."

"No. I have inquired; no one has come back yet.

"Then what in the world are we to do?"

Boyd lounged easily against the balustrade, lightly tapping it with his whip.

"I'm quite happy," he said.

"Mr. Boyd, you're most provoking. You're not a bit sorry for what you've done."

"I'm afraid I *am* a hardened sinner. I can't regret our ride. We've had a delightful tête-à-tête, and——"

"Missed the very thing we went to see. How supremely ridiculous we shall look when they come back."

"Then we had better be out of the way. As they have not returned, why shouldn't we take a walk? I wish you would," he added, in an earnest tone. "I want to impart to you a very important secret."

The lady was not so easily conciliated. "I object to walking in my habit," she said curtly; then as Boyd approached her she continued—"Don't come near me. I'm much too angry; you make me feel quite like a porcupine."

"In what way, for pity's sake?"

"All over sharp little points."

The artist smiled.

"So is a rose," he said, "but we don't shun it on account of its prickles. We take all the more pains to pluck it."

The pretty compliment had its effect; but the lady would not confess it.

"And make your fingers smart for a week," she responded.

Boyd spoke in an earnest tone.

"Miss Somers—Blanche—let there be a truce to this banter. Let us be serious a moment."

"Well, I am quite serious—but pray don't call me by my Christian name. Only think, if any one should have heard you!"

Boyd went on in his grave tone.

"May I not claim that privilege? You must know what I feel for you."

Blanche looked up with a returning twinkle in her pretty eyes.

“How should I? You never told me!”

“Love’s language is not upon the lips,” said the artist. “He speaks in the glance of an eye, the quickened throbbing of the heart, the tremulous touch of the hand. I do love you—deeply, devotedly. Will you consent to be my wife?”

He was on the seat by her side now, and she did not move. A flush of happiness stole over her face, however, in spite of herself; but the temptation to play with her enthusiastic lover—so irresistible in the heyday of youth and happiness—was still uppermost.

“It is no good my consenting,” she said.

“Why not, in Heaven’s name?”

"Because you must ask the Lord Chancellor."

The answer was a startling one, and made Boyd open his eyes to their utmost stretch.

"The Lord Chancellor!" he echoed, in surprise.

"Of course. Don't you know I'm a ward?"

"I did not know it; but it makes no difference."

"Oh, yes, it does though," she persisted. "The Lord Chancellor is very particular. He may have a prejudice against Royal Academicians—a good many people have. And, perhaps, you may have turned out a portrait of him some time or other, and that would be fatal, you know."

Boyd began to look seriously chagrined

"Can you not be serious for once?" he said.

"I'm perfectly serious," she replied. Then, turning away her head, and speaking very fast, she added, "I like you very much indeed—there! I never said anything half so dreadful before. I'm blushing fearfully I know. But the Lord Chancellor is a very serious business, I can assure you. Do you know I saw him once?"

Boyd had brightened up at her declaration, and was so supremely happy that he fell in with her lighter mood.

"Were you very much frightened?" he asked.

"Dreadfully, when I first went in; but I was so disappointed. I thought he always sat on a woolsack, and wore a long wig; but he was in a leather arm-chair, and

had a bald head. Of course I was very demure, for I knew he could send me to prison if he liked."

"Indeed!" cried Boyd, endeavouring to look concerned.

"Oh, yes," she continued; "and I am told he has the privilege of transporting any one who marries me without his consent."

"I should be transported in any case if I married you. I don't mind running the fearful risk."

Blanche was quite melted by this time.

"Don't you?" she responded; "what pretty things you do say. If you said half such pretty things to the Lord Chancellor—told him he was a rose, for instance—he would consent at once!"

He was closer to her now, and had

taken her hand, which was not withdrawn.

"May I try?" he said, softly.

"Yes, if you like to risk transportation!" She suddenly started, "Good gracious! here they come!" she exclaimed.

Boyd rose with as much coolness as he could command. Sir Arthur and the rest of the party approached from the end of the terrace.

Deverell laughed as he drew near. "Be good enough to give an account of yourselves, you two," he exclaimed

"I told you we should be brought to the bar of public opinion," said Blanche, in an undertone, to Boyd. Then aloud to Sir Arthur—

"I refer you to my escort; I'm not responsible."

"Indeed, I think you are!" retorted Sir Arthur. "Mr. Boyd preferred the lady to the landscape evidently."

"You forget, Sir Arthur, that my studies are generally figure, not landscape," pleaded Boyd.

"And you thought you would take a quiet opportunity of continuing your studies this morning. Well, under the circumstances I don't blame you."

He turned to his wife. "Now, touching these theatricals you're all bent on having?" he said.

"Let us form ourselves into a committee," cried Lady Deverell. "Mr. Poingdestre, you're a great actor—you shall be chairman."

"No," said Val, who was conversing in

an undertone with Miss Vereker ; " I delegate that honour to our host."

" Yes, yes, of course."

There was a general clamour of voices round Sir Arthur. Val and Miss Vereker were leaning out over the terrace, a little apart.

" You were going to tell me what it is you especially worship," the lady said.

" Money! and its personification in you," was the daring answer.

Miss Vereker drew herself up stiffly. The answer was almost too much even for her equanimity to tolerate.

" You are candid, certainly," she said.

" I told you this morning I liked to go straight, though it sometimes got me into difficulties. Has it done so in this case?"

he asked, with an earnestness not usual in him.

Miss Vereker paused a moment before she replied, then she said, somewhat coldly:

"I forgive you, for the novelty of your confession."

"Then you are not offended?"

"No."

Val felt encouraged. He went on gaily—

"I may, perhaps, venture to hope that my candour is more palatable to you than the flattery which assails you wherever you go?"

"Possibly."

"And—that I have found some favour in your sight?"

"Possibly."

There was another pause. Val was feeling his ground.

"You may think me strange," he said.
"I own my ideas are often at variance with the rest of the world. They say that money is the root of all evil—they are wrong. The root of all evil is—impecuniosity."

"You think so," she replied.

"I am sure of it!" he insisted. "People with money have their trials, I admit; but people without, have their trials also, and the aggravation of impecuniosity to boot."

Lady Deverell's voice was heard at this moment.

"'A Bold Stroke for a Wife?'" Oh, dear no: that's quite too old for our present ideas."

Val turned, and followed Miss Vereker towards the group.

"I venture to differ, Lady Deverell. I think at the present time it is very appropriate."

At this moment a servant appeared, and approached Sir Arthur.

"Sir John Bolt wishes to see you in the library immediately, Sir Arthur," the man said.

"What does he want?" demanded the baronet, somewhat impatiently.

"I'm not aware, Sir Arthur. Mr. Bulfinch is with him."

"Mr. Bulfinch—at this time! What can *he* want? Say I will come," he added.

The servant re-entered the house, Sir Arthur turned to follow.

"I shall be back presently, Kate," he said. "Meanwhile, you can talk the matter over. I only stipulate for one thing—I must have an easy part. I'm not good at sentiment or sudden emotion."



CHAPTER XV.

RUIN.

SIR ARTHUR passed into the library.

Mr. Bulfinch and Mr. Poulson, the banker, were seated at the table examining some papers. Although to some extent associated with Bulfinch in the affairs connected with the Norton estates, the banker was a complete contrast to the lawyer. He was a man of the strictest integrity—modest, unassuming, yet calculated by his manner to inspire every one

who had any dealings with him, with the utmost confidence in his ability. He rose as Sir Arthur entered the room, and advanced to meet him. The baronet shook hands with him warmly, nodded to Mr. Bulfinch, and passed on at once to Sir John Bolt, who was seated by the window.

The Admiral's face wore such a look of pain that Sir Arthur was quite startled.

"Why, Sir John, I hope there is nothing serious the matter—you look quite ill."

His old friend motioned to him to sit down. He did so, looking from one to the other, as if seeking some explanation.

"You positively alarm me with your grave faces. What does it all mean?" he asked.

Mr. Bulfinch was about to speak, but Sir John stopped him by a movement of

his hand. The old admiral's voice was quite changed from the firm laconic utterances of the night before. It was tremulous as if with extreme age.

"I wish to heaven, Arthur, I could in any way soften the fearful intelligence I have to impart. It is a hard task for one who loves you as I do. God help you to bear it patiently."

Sir Arthur looked at him in amazement. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"It is useless keeping you in suspense," the admiral replied. "You remember my warning about Keith—that warning came too late. Keith has absconded with a large sum of money."

Sir Arthur again looked at his informant with an expression which seemed to imply that he had taken leave of his senses.

"Keith absconded! Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"God knows I should be only too glad to think so," was the answer. "It is only too true, and worse remains to be told."

"Stop!" cried Sir Arthur, with a bitter smile, "before you go on, give me time to take in this interesting fact."

He rose from his chair, strode across the room, and placing his arms on the mantelpiece, let his head fall on them for a moment, as if thinking. When he turned and looked at them again, his face had quite changed—his lips were compressed, and his words fell from them with a cold distinctness.

"Do you mean to tell me that the man I have trusted as I would my own brother has played me false?" He turned to the

banker. "Mr. Poulson, you are a sensible man. What do you know? Is there no possibility that my old friend is deceived?"

The banker kept his eyes on the table before him.

"I regret to say, none," he answered.

Deverell drew a quick breath, as if in pain, but he did not move.

"So be it then," he said, with a look of concentrated scorn on his lips. "After this, gentlemen, I am not likely to be much disturbed by any further intelligence."

He turned, and standing with his back against the mantelpiece, regarded them calmly.

Deceit and treachery were qualities Sir Arthur could not understand. The knowledge of the existence of them in one he

had trusted so implicitly cut him like a knife—so deeply, indeed, that sensation seemed for a time numbed. But had Keith himself been there, and Deverell assured of his guilt, the position of the steward would not have been enviable.

“I am waiting, gentlemen,” he said after a pause of a minute or two.

His calmness seemed to rob Sir John of the small amount of resolution remaining in his breast. It was like commencing a painful operation anew, to continue what he had to say.

Bulfinch had all this time been gloating over the approaching discomfiture of the “infernally proud” Deverells. He was impatient of delay, and he saw that the Admiral was speechless. Now was his time.

"The fact is, Deverell, you're a ruined man," he said.

If he had been struck, Sir Arthur could not have been more astounded than he was by the familiar mode in which the lawyer addressed him. He had been accustomed to such sickening obsequiousness from this man, that the contrast of his present tone was startling. Without condescending to reply, however, he addressed himself to Mr. Poulson.

"I presume your presence here, at this unusual hour, is in connection with this unpleasant affair, Mr. Poulson. This gentleman's announcement is somewhat startling. Will you be so good as to tell me to what extent I am ruined, as he is pleased to express it?"

The two business men looked at each

other, but neither replied. Bulfinch was chafing under the baronet's rebuff, and did not feel disposed to run the risk of another. Sir John, with an effort, collected himself sufficiently to proceed.

"Arthur, it is useless disguising the fact. You must know it sooner or later. Your property is hopelessly involved, the scoundrel has effected your entire ruin!"

He paused again, unable to proceed. Deverell became impatient.

"For Heaven's sake, one of you, tell me the plain truth, in plain language! It is ridiculous to talk of ruin with an income of twenty thousand a year! To what extent am I involved? Are you all struck dumb? Does it involve the sale of the stud, or a mortgage, or what? Let me know at once!"

"That is already effected," said Mr. Poulson, sadly.

Deverell turned on him sharply. "What is already effected?" he asked.

"A mortgage on Norton Towers."

"Norton Towers mortgaged?"

The question was put incredulously. The fact was too difficult to realise. Bulfinch was ready with another shot.

"Yes; and to the last farthing of its value!"

"Norton mortgaged?" again gasped Sir Arthur, looking from one to the other suspiciously. "Upon whose authority I should like to know?"

Bulfinch selected a parchment from the table, and presented the signature to Sir Arthur. "Upon the authority of your own hand and seal," he answered.

Deverell recognised the writing ; it was his own.

"The villain !" he muttered, "he never told me the contents."

"You declined to hear them," responded Bulfinch, whose ear had not lost a word.

Deverell turned on him like lightning. "You appear to be in his secrets, sir," he said.

"So far as that, I was. I urged him not to let you sign until you knew the contents. He told me it was useless—that you would not listen. You best know whether or not that was true."

"Too true—damn him !"

His temper was gone at last. He could have borne it from the others, but to be baited, as it were, by Bulfinch, was what

his proud blood could not brook. He broke out again—"For God's sake, let me know the worst, some one!"

Mr. Poulson replied this time. "Sir John told you the truth when he said you were a ruined man. His words were *literally* true. The liabilities are so enormous that the estates must inevitably go. We shan't save a hundred pounds from the wreck. If, however, we could induce Nugent to withdraw his claim——"

His words were arrested by the action of Sir Arthur. He advanced towards the table, stopped suddenly, and grasped the back of a chair. The overwhelming force of the blow which had fallen seemed to paralyse him ; but his pride still struggled to maintain a calm exterior, and his words were firm.

"Nugent will *not* withdraw his claim. I will not allow him."

The blood of the old race was in those words. Even in this extremity, the man he intended to befriend should not suffer through his fault. He would die rather.

Bulfinch struck in again with a covert sneer—

"Yes; but if the estate don't cover the liabilities, Nugent must take his share with the rest!"

Deverell started as if he had been stung, then drew himself up proudly.

"The estate *shall* cover the liabilities, if I sell the last acre I have in the world—the last picture on these walls," he added, sadly, turning to the choice collection of gems he had gathered in that room for his own especial enjoyment. "Mr. Poulson

we will go into these matters to-morrow—I must have time to think.”

He turned suddenly to Bulfinch, and fixed on him a glance before which that gentleman, with all his bravado, seemed to cower. A new light, like a revelation, at that moment dawned upon Sir Arthur. The scene in the hunting-field came back to him, as vividly as if it had occurred but yesterday, together with the remembrance of many suspicious incidents connected with their later intercourse. When he spoke again, it was in a stern tone of conviction which left the man whom he addressed, in spite of all his efforts, white and speechless.

“Mr. Bulfinch,” he said, “an instinct tells me that you are at the bottom of this villainy. God forgive me if I am wrong,

but I feel absolutely convinced that you have schemed and plotted to bring about this result. You will, therefore, leave this house to-day for the last time. You will hand over your papers to me. Meanwhile rest assured of this, that if my words are true, your villainy will one day find you out, as sure as there is a God above us. Come, Sir John, they will be waiting dinner."

He strode across the room. For one brief instant he seemed to waver, and his hand wandered in a purposeless kind of way towards the handle of the door. The next moment he grasped it firmly, threw open the door, and waited for Sir John to pass out. Then he turned to the banker.

"Mr. Poulson, you will take dinner with us?" he said.

The banker glanced down at his morning costume, apologetically.

“Oh, we will excuse your dressing. We have no strangers coming. You will join us in the drawing-room.”

The blood of the old race upheld him even in this terrible crisis, and he passed from the room with a firm step.

END OF VOL. I.

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